**A Cliff And The Wine Dark Sea**

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# A Cliff And The Wine Dark Sea

by saintsavage

Summary

After the Dragon, Will wakes up as a ten year old in Shreveport, Louisiana.

Mature rating because this is the Hannibal universe.

# A Wayplace

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The room is a wayplace, the only sound it holds a soft breathing in the grey morning light. Even as the figure in the bed shifts there is nothing but stillness. A soft peace.

Overly cheery posters and a stiffness that speaks of both an overabundance of personalities and none at all linger in the room, a place made for strangers. Filled with simple, clean furniture, the kind you get at Walmart for $19.99 and put together with pegs and a few muttered, exasperated curses. It is the type of room Will had grown familiar with early on, a place for stashing the lost for a lack of anywhere else to put them.

Suddenly the figure in the bed freezes, stops breathing entirely before his back arches up, up, up. Painfully so. His mouth is open in a silent cry.

And that is his first thought, here in this room that he hasn't seen since he was ten years old. *Why doesn't it hurt?* Even as his body crashes back against the bed he's moving, sitting up with his naked back against the cheap headboard, staring around in utter confusion because he *knows* this room. *But that can't be right, can it?* He hasn't seen this room since the time his father went on a bender and left him in a hotel for two weeks. They'd caught him scavenging in the trash at a local dive, scrubbed him down, and placed him in foster care.

It's been so long he can't remember the name of the family that had taken him in for a paycheck, they'd only had him for three weeks before Bill Graham had shown up, sober and sorry. He was always sorry, afterward.

*What's happening? Hannibal, where's Hannibal?* He can feel how hard his heart is beating, raging against his chest because they'd... and then... and now he was alone. Bereft in this place, without his anchor. *I can't be alone. Not again.* His hand flies up to his neck, terror reaching a new level to find that the freshly laid bite, which should have been hours old, is absent. *No, no, no.*

But wakefulness has brought another piece of clarity to him, a shocking thought that is almost violent in it's intensity: *Mischa might still be alive.*

With a quickness he'd forgotten he possessed, Will is gracelessly scrabbling off of his twin bed and down the stairs, without another thought. Given the year he won't be able to easily access a computer, especially at this hour, but a newspaper... he thinks he remembers this family getting one. Barring that he can always turn on the news, but he's reluctant to disturb the quiet of the morning. There's something sacred about it. He's never been particularly superstitious, but Will is suddenly convinced that he's tucked away in a fragile moment in time and space. If he isn't careful, he'll be plucked right back to his own time. To a cliff and the wine dark sea.

To that end, he slows down, forces himself to be cautious as he slinks down the stairs, hyper-aware of everything.

It's too early for the family to be awake. He's recalling more about them now, the frumpy beta housewife with nicotine stained fingers and a lifetime of resentment. The balding alpha father, completely checked out from life. He thinks they might have had children, once. But he'd never met them, only saw their smiling faces in photographs crookedly lining the stairwell.

His mind is buzzing. He doesn't know, exactly, the year that Mischa Lecter died. Her headstone didn't say and asking Hannibal felt profane, somehow. The sort of violation they'd never committed against one another. (The only one, possibly.) But if he's right, then it's sometime soon. She'd been very young, but Hannibal had remarked once that she'd been closer to Will's age than his own. Even now, it could be too late. Hannibal could be staring in dawning horror at three little milk teeth in the bottom of a roughly made bowl.

*No*. Will can't accept that, and doesn't question why. The idea of not at least *trying* to stop that from happening is impossible. He doesn't think beyond it. He can't. Whatever is happening, whatever has happened, he's living in a world where the most precious thing Hannibal's life still lives and breathes. And like *hell* is Will going to not do everything he can to keep it that way.

Later he can think of consequences, of what it might mean for him. For them.

Sneaking out on bare feet he quickly finds the newspaper, confirming that he's right. It's late October and he's in Shreveport, Lousiana. The faded paint on the mailbox says Grimsley. Fitting.

*Okay, so this is happening. Unless it's a strange delusion or the world's strangest fever dream... no, I'm going to operate on the assumption that this is real.* He squeezes his fist hard in his hand, hard enough that the nails dig in to the meat of his palm. *It feels real*.

Will goes back in to the house and up the stairs, thinking hard about what he knows for certain. Hannibal is in Lithuania. *Has he... is he like me? Displaced in time?* There's only one way to find out: Will is going to have to find him.

*Good thing I've always been particularly good at that.*

Trouble is, there isn't a boat handy, and he's stuck in the body of his ten year old self. That could be a problem. Will dresses quickly, tugging an overworn tshirt over his head. He doesn't have many belongings here, having arrived with a trashbag full of clothes and a stack of books, but if he's going to bullshit anyone at the airport convincingly he'll need luggage.

That part is easy. He digs out a battered brown duffel bag from the hall closet, fills it with what he has and rounds it off with some food from the kitchen. He sneaks in to the Grimsley's bedroom and finds an old handgun under the bed, tucking it in to his belt after checking that it was loaded. He won't be able to take it on a plane, but he could sell it, maybe. There's money in the man's wallet, a tattered twenty and a few ones, but he needs more and pockets

the debit card too. Thankfully, Michael Grimsley was a lazy, careless man and has the pin number taped to the side of his card with a piece of paper.

Will thinks about taking their car, a dated blue sedan as neglected as the rest of the house, but decides against it. The paper told him it was Saturday, which meant they probably wouldn't be leaving the house and thus wouldn't notice the debit card or the money being gone, but the car would give him away immediately. Another memory hits him, of being in this house. Staying up in the room they'd stowed him in because he could feel how unwanted and disliked he was.

They wouldn't notice he was gone for a while. Maybe all day.

Strange that it hurts, a little. He didn't even particularly remember them or like them, but rejection never gets any easier. And having strangers hate him just because he was different had never gotten any easier for him. *It doesn't matter. They don't matter. Stop feeling sorry for yourself, Graham. Focus.*

He hefts the duffel bag on to his shoulder and leaves out the back door. The sun is still barely up, looming just at the tree line. He walks for several blocks until he spots an old Ford parked at the curb which he quickly hotwires. Reaching the pedals is a problem, briefly, before he digs the books out of his bag and uses them to drive. He won't need them for long, just until he can reach downtown.

This is where things could potentially go wrong. Will has a rough idea in his head about how he's going to get out of the country, but that's going to depend on what obstacles he encounters as he goes. This next stop has the potential to make or break him. But it's not going to. *This is going to work. It has to work.*

The truck lurches to an uneasy stop in one of the seedier parts of town, near the bridge and a few blocks away from the bank where he's just stolen six hundred dollars from the Grimsleys, withdrawing it with a confidence he doesn't feel. He remembers passing this place on the school bus in the morning, a sort of camp where the homeless tended to gather. All he needs is an adult who can convincingly pass as his parent that can buy him a ticket and send him off on his way.

Will's never been more grateful for how lax the laws used to be than he is now. He doubts they'll even ask for much ID.

After a pause, Will digs the gun out of the duffel bag and tucks it in the front of his pants. Better safe than sorry. Then he exits the truck - leaving it running and hoping that nobody steals it (for the second time) this early in the morning. He's already got a vague idea of who he's going to ask to help him. He's seen him before, a bit haggard with a shaggy beard and hair, probably in his mid 30's. He panhandles and sometimes can be found by the docks, drinking and working for a quick buck.

He finds him easily, already awake and huddled by a small campfire. Predictably, the man greets him with a brush off. "We don't take in runaways, boy."

"Not a runaway." He man glances up, briefly, but doesn't make eye contact.

"You look like one."

Will doesn't deny it. And, technically, he supposes he is, even if it's absurd to think at his age (his *real* age) he's a runaway child. "I have a job for you, if you're interested." The man hunches over on himself, but he looks up again, holding Will's eyes.

"I've seen you before."

Though it's a surprise to be remembered at all, Will supposes he would have been noticed. A young omega child, unattended in a busy boatyard. "Yeah, you have. My dad works at the docks, sometimes." He shrugs, shifting his weight. From what he's seen of the man he's fairly decent, the sort who wants to do the right thing but often falls short. An alcoholic, but he has a wedding band, so he's probably got a family. Maybe a kid. Will's counting on him wanting to help him, which is why he's come up with an angle the man will find harder to say no to. "Listen, the state took me away. I just want to go live with my mom. She's in Paris for the summer, and my dad... she thought I'd be okay with him."

It isn't the worst lie he's told, and he can see the man thinking about it. If nothing else the man *does* believe him.

"I can pay you. It's not a lot, but she left me some money when she dropped me off." He pauses, allowing tears to build up in his eyes. "I just want my mom, okay?"

After a long silence, the man nods. "What do you need me to do, kid?"

"Just pretend you're my dad. Buy me a ticket at the airport. That's it. I'll give you $100 and buy you a new outfit. Shoes, too." *Appeal to his need, to his sense of right and wrong.* "Please. My foster dad... he's an alpha. And he scares me." Will knows what he looks like now, eyes big and beseeching. Distressed.

The homeless man might be a beta, but an omega in trouble is something that's hard to resist, especially a child.

"Okay, I'll help you." He stands, brushing off his knees before holding a hand out. "My name is Jim. Yours?"

"Will." He wouldn't have given his real name, but he'll need to know it at the airport. "Let's go."

Chapter End Notes

I know - I KNOW - I have unfinished stuff to work on. But this thing has been clogging my inspiration for a month now so I'm just going to write it. I am tentatively saying this will be 12 chapters long? But I don't know and that's more of a guess. In an ideal world, I'm going to update on Saturdays. In a very ideal world, this will be a three part series. But I promise nothing. Also I don't have a beta reader, so apologies if it's a little rough.

Note: I did some fudging with ages here. Mischa is 5, Hannibal is 17, Will is 10.

# He Can Try

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"You steal this?" It's the first thing the man has said in the twenty minutes since they returned to the idling truck and headed towards a local thrift store. Will hadn't even specified where Jim would be getting his new clothes but the man seemed to head there out of habit. *He probably hasn't had anything new in years.*

When they'd reached the truck initially Jim had frowned, but hadn't said anything. Will had wondered if he'd even broach the subject or not. He struck him as the sort of man who did his best to stay on the straight and narrow, no matter the circumstances he found himself in. Driving a stolen truck with what amounted to a runaway kid wouldn't sit well with him.

But said kid looked thin and smelled afraid, and needed help, and that would appeal to him. The idea that he could do something *good*, something *noble*. Even if he was telling himself it was for more practical reasons. For that, Will found himself telling more of a story than he'd meant to, his empathy reaching out to the strange, lonely man in a way he hadn't expected. Wanting to soothe him for no other reason than it would make him feel better.

*He reminds me of me.*

It had happened before, though not since he'd crash landed in this timeline. And not in a long time. Will had learned to control himself, to keep his so called gifts carefully contained because it didn't do him any favors to get attached like this. But the words were tumbling out of his throat now, designed to evoke pity and to reassure Jim that he was doing the right thing. "...I had to. He's going to hurt me if I don't get away. I promise I'm not keeping it... just borrowing it."

Though what he's saying is pure fiction - the home he'd been in hadn't been that unsavory and he'd never been in that kind of danger - in that moment it feels true. There are tears blurring his vision now, threatening to spill over as he impatiently swipes at them, and he can feel more than see how Jim responds to that display of vulnerability, watching the man's knuckles tighten until they are bone white against the steering wheel, jaw clenched. In that moment, Jim *aches*, and Will feels all of it with him. *He has a family out there, somewhere. Unprotected. Unsafe. But they're safer with him gone, after what he'd done. He didn't deserve their love and understanding.*

There was more to it, something simmering just underneath the surface emotions, but Will forced himself to look out the window instead, to not pry any more than he had to because it *hurt*, feeling all of that guilt and anguish. It mired in with his own, doubled down everything he was already trying so hard not to feel. *I just need to not think about it. About anything. Getting to Hannibal is the only thing that matters right now.*

After several long moments the tension ebbs and he can sense the moment has passed. Jim

confirms it by clearly his throat roughly. "Alright, let's just... never mind that."

They're both clearly uncomfortable now, Will wiping at his eyes every now and then. "We need to get you clothes first. Maybe..." In the history of subject changes Will can't imagine a more forced, awkward one than that, but Jim takes the lifeline for what it is, steering them once more toward neutrality.

"A shower and a shave? You won't offend me, kid. I know what I look like." He laughs briefly and Will counts it as a victory that it's only partway bitter. "There's a truck stop on the way, I'll clean up there first."

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When they get to the truck stop, the sun is finally out and beginning to climb in the sky. It has Will feeling nervous, anxious about every moment not actively seeking out Hannibal... but he reminds himself that this is a necessary stop. For more than one reason, though he isn't dwelling too closely on the budding feelings he has in regards to doing something to return the favor Jim is doing for him.

Instead of allowing himself to be frustrated he hands Jim ten dollars so he can go to the little gas station and buy some soap and a razor, as well as get some quarters for the shower. The man pauses before he exists the truck, eyeing his bag, but ultimately he leaves it with Will, trusting him not to steal anything.

Naturally, curiosity has him wanting to snoop, but he resists the temptation. *It's none of my business who Jim is. He doesn't matter. Whatever is haunting him is not my business and I've got enough problems as it is, I don't need to fix him because I feel bad about lying.* Even in his head that sounds like bullshit, but it keeps him from opening the bag.

Jim returns with his purchases and they drive around back where the showers are. Again, Jim pauses when it comes time to leave his bag behind. It seems to be more an anxiety thing than anything, probably ingrained after spending so many years on the streets. "I'll watch your bag, I promise." Whatever Jim sees in Will, he seems to trust, because he nods his head and leaves his only belongings behind.

This time Will doesn't bother trying to stop himself. He immediately dives in and pulls back the zipper. What he finds are mostly clothes and a tattered blanket. Underneath there's a book - some kind of murder mystery of the dime store variety - a few protein bars, and a water bottle that's clearly been reused. No alcohol, surprisingly. *Then again Jim seems like the type to drink everything he has right away rather than hoarding it for later. Just like Dad.*

Will also finds the man's wallet, flipping it open to find his driver's license - Jim Crane, 38, from Little Rock, AK - and a few photos that are turned away from the viewer. Pulling them out reveals a younger Jim with his arm around a sweet-faced blonde. Between them is a little boy, maybe two years old. Something about it makes his throat tight but Will puts everything back and refuses to think about it.

After the emotional high of the cliff, it's hard to keep putting off the inevitable breakdown.

He doesn't know what he'll do when he finds Hannibal. It might overwhelm him again, be too much to manage, but for now he's just going to do what he's always done: ignore it and hope he can put himself back together after the fact.

When Jim comes back out he looks more like the man in the picture, shaved clean with his black curls still damp. He looks better, already. Lighter. "Next stop?"

"There's a shop down on seventh."

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Together they pick out a few outfits for Jim to try on, all new. Nothing too fancy, because Will wants them to be something that Jim can actually use beyond their little farce, but still respectable. He also insists on a coat, because the one Jim has is worn thin and winter is just around the corner. It's clear the man wants to argue with him, mouth pulled tight in a thin, unhappy line, but in the end Will stares him down and he relents.

Will's still thinking about the photo. About whatever Jim did that was so bad he had to run away from everything he knew and loved. *Even at his worst my Dad never would have left me. It didn't even matter what was best for me. I was his and he was keeping me.* He didn't get that feeling from Jim. If anything, it was obvious that he'd *chosen* exile rather than be sent away. It said something about his character that he was willing to sacrifice something that clearly meant so much to him.

Given the time period and his general mannerisms Will wondered if he'd been in the service.

His reflections were cut short when the man himself appeared out of the dressing room wearing a blue plaid button up and a pair of black jeans. The shoes he'd chosen were heavy winter boots, practical to a fault, but they'd serve him well. They were the only thing he hadn't questioned Will putting in their basket. "Well, how do I look?"

"Good, like a whole new man."

Jim smiled at him, a brief flash of crooked teeth. Pleased. "No use trying on the rest, never had any patience with that sort of thing."

Will returned the smile, almost conspiratorially. "Neither did I."

For a brief moment uncertainty bleeds in to Jim's posture. "Can I wear this out, do you think?" His old clothes hang limply in his arms, rag-like compared to what he's wearing.

"Of course you can." Will pays and the cashier doesn't even look her nose down at them, something that causes Jim to stand up a bit straighter. It never ceased to amaze Will, how far a little bit of kindness and decency went towards restoring a person's faith in themselves.

Once they're back in the car he can feel the questions sitting right there on the end of his tongue like pit vipers. He wants to ask so badly, to poke around, to see if maybe there isn't a way to help Jim. Had he Hannibal's skill in manipulation he might have tried, but he's too

impatient to do so. And he needs Jim to pull through for him, to put on a convincing show, and he can't do that if he's distressed.

Will bites the words back and tries not to hate himself for it.

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"Yeah, I hate to send him, but I just got a job hauling freight. The road ain't no place for my boy." Jim idly pats his head, playing at affection. There hadn't been any discussion prior to arriving at the airport, but the role Jim has adopted suits him. Feels natural. Will has to wonder if he's not projecting, pretending that Will is the boy in the photo. "His mama can't wait to see him."

The woman behind the counter beams, smiling at the display. "I'm sure he'll have a wonderful time. I've always wanted to go, myself." She's already processing the ticket, taking the cash Will had given Jim without even a pause. She hasn't even asked for an ID from Will at all, though he has the one from his school ready, just in case.

Once she's done she hands Jim the ticket and wishes Will a good trip, and it's done. *Well. I'm on my way, to France at least. One step closer. But what am I going to find when I get there? Is it too late? What if Hannibal is already gone? And is he like me, or am I alone is this? Please be Hannibal, my Hannibal. Please.*

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Jim walks him to the gate, kneels down like a father saying goodbye to his son. His voice is low when he asks. "You gonna be okay, kid?"

"Of course." The words are automatic, but Jim squeezes his shoulder, almost reluctant to let him go now that they've accomplished what they set out to do. He seems like he wants to say something else and Will can't help but look closer, see that Jim is on the verge of offering to go with him, that he's afraid for him, that he wants to do right by this kid he doesn't even know because he's... *noble? Good? What do those words even mean?*

"Take care of yourself over there. Hope you find whoever it is you're looking for." Ah. So Jim didn't really believe everything Will had told him. But he'd still done it.

"You did the right thing, Jim." Suddenly he finds himself wanting to assure the man, this stranger, and he can say what he wanted to before because the flight is already boarding.

"Hope so." He doesn't look convinced, but he stands up anyway, backing away from Will as a flight attendant comes over to collect him, pining a little identification tag on his shirt. He starts to follow her but at the last minute he stops and turns around. Maybe he can't fix everybody. Maybe he's just trying to make up for the fact that he isn't the decent, good man he'd tried so hard to be before Hannibal sunk his claws in to him and forced him to acknowledge the truth of himself.

But he can at least try.

"Go home, Jim. Whatever you did they love you and miss you every single second."

That said, Will turns around and boards the plane, turning all of his attention to what might await him. He has so much further to go, and at any moment it could already be too late.

Chapter End Notes

So, Jim just kind of became a person all on his own. In the original draft he was an unnamed throwaway line, but he morphed in to... well, Jim Crane. Sorry if that annoys anyone, I don't tend to throw OC's in to stories like this, but it just happened and it works so I'm going with it. Also Will's state of mind right now is extremely fragile. He's focusing everything he has on finding Hannibal and possibly saving Mischa, mostly so he doesn't have to think about what he's done because it's still too much to process. It made writing him a little bit harder, but I hope he still comes across as himself?

# Paris, Finally

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Before Jack, Will had never been on an airplane. He'd always preferred to stay on the ground - or the water - because it meant he was in control of the destination. Having the wheel in his hands often gave him the grounding he needed to get through the stress of traveling outside of his comfort zone. But of course, the FBI didn't have time to hold his hand and whether he liked it or not, crime scenes couldn't wait forever, and so he found himself flying more and more as the years progressed.

Not that he ever got used to it, but in the very least Jack had always handled all of the arrangements. It meant Will could excuse himself with a glass of scotch and a pair of headphones, even if he spent most of the flight white-knuckling it.

This flight isn't any different, unfortunately. The engine starts and Will feels the fluttering weightlessness hit him the second the wheels leave the ground. His chest is already tight but he fights through the (annoying) breathing exercises he'd been taught in hopes that it might help relieve some of the anxiety. Given how long he's going to be on this plane, and how unlikely it is that he'll be able to access any kind of alcohol, he needs some kind of handhold.

Surprisingly enough, it works. Perhaps because he can hear Hannibal's voice in his head, coaching him through it. Reminding him of everything that is at stake if he can't keep it together. It's bittersweet, that voice. He wants to hear it in person more than anything in the world but also dreads it because there's every chance he's alone in this. In all of this.

Which is probably why Will wants to curl up and sleep. That he can't is typical and frustrating, but he spends most of the first two hours staring blindly out the window, trying to figure out the impossible. His mind is on overdrive trying to sort everything, what happened, what might happen... even when he lands in Paris, there's so much further to go. And as the faint reflection in the window keeps reminding him he's going to need to work a lot smarter than he has in the past if he's going to make it.

Too many people are going to look at him and assume he needs help, or is lost, or is perhaps a handy victim. Will can resent that all he wants, but that's just a fact for him now.

Of course, while he's focused on planning out his next movies he is also very decidedly *not* thinking about Hannibal. And the cliff. And everything that forced him to this moment now, staring at the slate-grey water below with no small amount of fear and longing. It feels almost like a mockery to be flying above it again. Like thumbing his nose at the universe. It's something Hannibal would find amusing, no doubt, but it just fills Will with dread. He doesn't think he'll ever look at the ocean again without thinking about what it stole from him. What it might steal still.

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Nearly halfway there, Will succumbs to exhaustion, falling in to his dreams. He'd resisted because he was afraid of what he might do - he'd never been a placid sleeper - and sure enough he's shaken awake some time later by a stewardess radiating worry. He tells her he's never flown before, some false nothing of a story about being afraid because he's alone, and she seems to believe him readily enough. Even brings him hot chocolate with sprinkles, as though it's a magical cure all. *It's not her fault she thinks I'm just a scared kid.*

Personally, Will would rather have one of the miniature bottles of rum underneath her cart.

The last stretch of the agonizingly long flight is spent reflecting on his choices now. From the moment he woke up he's been hyper-focused on Hannibal, but there's time in this moment to reflect on just what it is he's going to do with himself once that's been accomplished. He imagines a life spent tracking down all the killers he hunted before, the ones who plague his nightmares.

Will can easily see himself destroying them before they hurt a single soul, and it feels good to think about, exactly the kind of thing Jack would have expected from him. Even been proud of. *You did good, Will. Saved all those people.* But in his head there's another voice. *And what about you, Will? Would that save you?*

Good old Jack, so ready to sacrifice. Given the same chance Will has he knows that Jack would stop at nothing to see justice done with the minimum loss of life. But he can admit to himself, in the quiet of his head thousands of feet above the rolling sea, that he doesn't *want* to become some sort of vigilante. It doesn't appeal to him at all. He's changed too much to find satisfaction in that role, enough to realize he's never been that man despite all of his efforts to the contrary. Will Graham isn't a hero.

At the same time, even after everything... he still isn't sure is he's what Hannibal thinks he is either. And that scares him, because he's rushing to the man's side - he's *always* running to Hannibal - but what if their swan dive has made Hannibal see that Will doubts? That he may *always* doubt their grand future together? What if he's angry? What if he isn't even there? *Maybe it'll be better if it's just me that came back. He can't hate me if he's not here.*

And wouldn't that be a poetic end to it all? Will leading the charge, saving Hannibal and Mischa before fading softly in to the night? He can see himself, spattered in blood, letting himself out in to the cold. Wandering in to the darkened trees surrounding the estate and walking until the snow took him. The stars must shine so brightly there, pinpricks of pure light, and Will can imagine a small, sliver of an eye-like moon peaking back at him from up above. And then he could sleep. A forever sort of rest, the kind he's always idealized in the darkest recesses of his mind.

These morbid thoughts aren't unusual for him, but Will suspects that the increase is to blame on something else. (Not the giant, screaming well of unprocessed emotion that he's ignoring, either.) He's read about Wasting before. About what happens to omegas without their mates. The initial symptoms are gradual - dizziness, fever, depression. But very quickly they get serious and fatal.

A whole mountain of sorrow feels like it's pressing down on his shoulders, and when he lifts his hands up they're shaking almost uncontrollably. He has no way of knowing for sure, of course, and it's not like the body he's in is physically bonded to Hannibal. *Yet... I was. For a few short hours I was and it was everything I have ever needed. Even with my doubts, my fears, I felt so whole and content. And now I'm alone again and it hurts so much.*

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Landing is a simple affair. Will stretches, still surprised by how limber his younger body is, by the lack of accompanying pops and creaks, and waits for the stewardess to collect him. It's the same one who woke him before, and she's all tired smiles now, doing her best to be reassuring. It makes him want to snap at her, but he resists the impulse, knowing it's borne of impatience and no small amount of nerves.

There's so much further to go, and now that they're on the same continent the feeling is tenfold. Will can practically feel his bones itching, demanding that he get moving *now*, right then. But he harnesses what little natural patience he's had - what's left of it, anyway, since Hannibal hacked away at it pretty heavily in their previous life - and returns her damn smile before following her off the plane.

Once they reach the gate he wiggles uncomfortably and asks if he can use the restroom while they 'wait for his mother' to arrive. After that it's the easiest thing in the world to duck in to a crowd and disappear.

Airports haven't changed much in twenty years and predictably this one eventually breaks off in to little cafes and gift shops, the latter of which Will definitely has an interest in because he needs a map. Going forward he has a feeling he's going to feel the loss of his cell phone more and more, but for now there isn't time to be annoyed at not being able to use Google to tell him where to go from here.

He still has the money he stole from the Grimsley's but it won't last forever. Not to mention it's American currency and as he goes on he gets the feeling it'll be essentially worthless. Will knows he could exchange it, at some point, but a bank teller is going to remember him and he doesn't want to risk being found or stopped by authorities.

Frowning as he walks, pretending to consider tacky plastic nick-knacks, Will considers his choices and decides he's going to steal the glossy mapbook tucked under his arm and make due with the money he has for now.

Leaving the airport he catches a taxi and pays to be taken to the nearest, cheapest hostel. Will would like nothing more than to hop on a train and continue right that very minute, but he knows he needs to rest. Needs time to gather himself and, to be completely honest, he knows he needs time to break too. He can't afford to freakout on a train or while he's hitchiking. *Better to get it out now and hope I can handle it.*

It's not like there are any convenient cliffs to throw himself off of if he can't.

---

Breaking down on command, it turns out, is harder than Will thought. Once he's checked in and settled in his room he stops actively avoiding what happened. He's mentally prepared to fall back in that headspace where everything was just too much and the only possible answer he had was for him and Hannibal both to perish. It had made *sense*. They had done something incredible together, lived out a moment of legend, and it felt like there'd just... there would be no topping that moment. *It was beautiful, and it was everything.*

Ever the pessimist, Will had naturally chosen to end them on a high note.

But now he's trying to think about it it's *forced*, coming in spurts and sputtering out before he even can grab hold of the thoughts themselves. Maybe he's just too stuck on finding Hannibal? That had always made him forget everything else to the point of being unhinged in the past. He supposed it shouldn't surprise him that it remains true now. The need to find him is unbearable, like needles in the skin.

And not just find him either. Will wants to protect him. To save him from the thing that broke Hannibal so impossibly. *Mischa*. He's never thought about her before, aside from as the root of Hannibal's more darker impulses. Never considered who she might have been, as a person. What she was like. It wasn't as though she really got to have a life at all before she was taken from the world in the most brutal, base fashion possible.

Was she like Hannibal, all cheekbones and ash blonde hair? He had the impression that she was sweet, someone Hannibal saw as pure and perfect. But weren't all children? *Not me. And definitely not now.* Was there a darkness too her? Did Hannibal want to cultivate it, or protect her from it?

He wondered what Hannibal would make of him, seeing him like this. If he was still aware - *oh god, please let him know me, it might kill me if he doesn't* - he'd probably be both charmed and pleased. He'd always wanted to have every part of Will, to possess all that he was and would be. Hannibal would enjoy seeing Will with babyfat and winsome wide eyes, utterly unblemished by the world. Untouched in every sense.

*Bastard that he is, he'll probably start planning on how best to deflower me now so he'll be ready for my heat. Would he even wait? There are ways to force it. I'm not sure if it would work, but Hannibal hasn't always cared about the consequences. And I know he wanted me, before. For a second after he sunk his teeth in to my neck I thought he'd say to hell with the dragon and take me to bed.*

But if he isn't aware, what then? What would Will find? Hannibal would be so young, old enough to be nearly an adult by most laws, but he'd be so different from the man Will had known. Would he know how to hide himself yet? Was he still playing by the rules? He'd never said before, if Mischa's killers had been the first for him. Perhaps the boy Will finds will already be covered in blood. Strange, to be curious about that boy. To want to have all of Hannibal, finally. To see him before he became the Wendigo of Will's dreams and nightmares.

Perhaps Hannibal isn't the only one who is possessive.

---

Buying a ticket at the train station is more difficult than the first leg of his journey. So far he's getting by with hand gestures and Creole, but Will knows it's going to be an obstacle the further he gets. *I'll just have to manage.* At least his empathy is helping him for once, leading him first to a very rude, aggressive alpha that he's able to pickpocket easily and then to a sympathetic teller who patiently explains the train schedule and the stops Will is going to need to take.

"You stop in Berlin, here. See? Berlin?"

"Yes, Berlin." Will nods his head to show he's understood, even if the variety of colors and lines on the map are a little daunting to look at. He's never been exceptionally great when it came to traveling. It made him anxious to even think about it which is why he'd usually let Jack handle everything and never, ever went on a vacation that required more than driving.

The teller pointed to the second ticket he'd purchased. "This will take you to Warsaw. Ask the ticket taker to help you find the right train, because there are many." Briefly she looks concerned. "There's no one with you?"

"No, my mother is waiting for me there." At least, Will hopes that's what he says. Just as he hopes he's understanding her correctly. Mentally he burns the image of each ticket in the right order in to his mind. "This one takes me to Vilnius, yes?"

"Yes, that's right. Good boy! The bus station is very close to the trains, so you'll be able to walk. You're very smart for an American, and so young! Your mother must be proud." She's smiling at him now, pleased. If the counter wasn't between them Will has no doubt that she'd pat his cheek in fondness and it's irritating though he doesn't let it show. *Christ, is this how people always acted around me when I was a kid? Looking back... yeah. That was usually before he opened his mouth or did something "weird".*

In that respect, he had a lot more practice acting normal now than he had at ten. Instead of grumping at the woman he smiles back and carefully takes the ticket and maps in hand. "Thank you." Strange to think it's only a few more stops between him and Hannibal. Once he gets to Vilnius he trusts his memory to guide him home. To Hannibal. But he needs to get there first.

---

A week later, Will is nearly there. He'd had to resort to hitchiking in the end. Dangerous, but he could feel something in his chest screaming at him to hurry, instincts telling him he *needed his alpha, needed Hannibal, that it was almost too late-*

---

He's forced to kill two men, shoving their corpses in the trunk and choosing to drive by himself from there. He reasons that they were going to hurt him anyway, so really they owe

him the car... but after a while, he begins to feel uneasy, having the bodies in there with him, like some sort of omen. Which is ridiculous, because he's been around plenty of dead bodies before.

Will knows if anybody spots him driving he's more apt to get away with it here - they're in the country now and he's driven past at least one person who looked younger than he did - but the dead men in the trunk will definitely but a damper on things on the off chance he gets pulled over. He uses that as an excuse to dump them. Pulling over on a side road near the forest and leaves their bodies there, wasting precious time doing so because they're *heavy* and so much larger than he is.

By the time he's on the road again it's begun to snow, blurring the landscape to the point where he doesn't quite know where he is, other than close. His chest feels tighter the closer he gets, like somebody is squeezing him in the middle. *I'm almost there. I'm so close I can taste it. Please don't let me be to late. He'll never forgive me if I'm too late. If it's even him. No, it has to be, it has to be Hannibal. it wouldn't be fair if it wasn't-*

And then he crashes in to a fence, blinking up through the blinding snow to see the looming, hulking Lecter castle a few hundred yards away.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so I'm hand-waving the fact that Will would A) probably not have the money for this sort of flight and B) would be making more then one stop. HAND WAVING. Actually I did a LOT of travel fudging. Honestly, there's time travel, ALL THE FUDGING is going to be happening and if I research travel times in the vaguely unspecified time they're currently in I'd never write the rest of it.

Also, next chapter WE ARE GONNA MEET HANNIBAL. FINALLY.

But will Mischa be there? Is it too late? Is it Will's Hannibal?

# Hannibal

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Through the falling snow and soft evening light the jarringly bright house seems almost ominous, somehow. In this moment Will realizes just how painfully lonely he's been since the moment he woke up in this body. He's never felt more isolated in his entire *life* and everything in him is screaming at him to *move*, to go and find Hannibal because he's the only one who can make it stop. But, if he's learned nothing else in his life, Will knows the importance of caution.

Especially when it comes to Hannibal.

Tentatively he raises his hand to his head, fingers coming away with a smear of blood. He's dizzy and his head is ringing after hitting it against the steering wheel, but otherwise he thinks he's fine. *I've survived worse, that's for damn sure.*

He can't explain his sudden hesitation, the tightness in his chest and throat as he stares and stares and *wills* himself to do something. *Anything*. Will has fought tooth and nail to get to this point, beyond reason and sanity... and now the moment is here. *The* moment. Possibly the defining moment of his life. And he's *afraid*.

What if he's too late and all he finds are bodies and blood? Will isn't sure of the details but he's confident that Hannibal fled the house for the woods once he finished dealing with the survivors. All but one, a man who lived on in penance after he bore witness to Hannibal's Becoming.

What if they are all alive - Hannibal, his sister, even their parents? What does he do then? Does he leave? Should he hide away in the very woods that no doubt held and protected Hannibal, waiting for the moment when the pack of monsters descends upon the house?

What if it isn't Hannibal?

That's the real question, isn't it? Whatever scenario he finds within Will knows he can adapt. *Hannibal made damn sure I could, tested my abilities beyond all doubt.* But what if he opens that door and finds a stranger wearing a much beloved face? A halfling trapped between darkness and light? What the hell is Will going to do then?

*Can I leave him behind, if he is yet unbroken?*

*Can I save him so completely that he never becomes the Wendigo of my nightmares?*

*Can I survive that?*

Will swallows heavily, watching the looming house in the distance, hoping for something. A

sign, maybe. A hint as to what lurks inside. But the snow continues to fall and reveal nothing, and it's only getting colder. He's already shivering in his borrowed coat, unused to such extreme weather. *Well, what are you going to do? You can sit here in a dead man's coat freezing your ass off, or you can go to him. Find what there is to find.*

*What's it gonna be, Graham?*

---

Will moves slowly, wincing at the muffled crunch of snow and ice under his feet, wishing he could move as silently as he once did. *Guess I'm rusty when it comes to potential murder stalking? I hate that that's even a thing I know how to do, but if I have to know how to move around like a fucking ninja the least I could do is be better at it. Christ. What even is my life?*

As he approaches the house he tries to stay low, on the off chance somebody sees him, a dark shadow against the snow. Most of the house is actually dark, silhouetted against the velvet sky, but there are lights on towards the front of the house, a few more in the back. From what he remembers of the layout that would mean the kitchen and... living room? Sitting room? *Whatever it's called, it is occupied.*

In theory.

Not that it helps him at all, he thinks ruefully to himself. What he needs is evidence of just who is dwelling within. The hapless Lecters? The invaders? The dead? *Focus, you idiot! This is what you do! Detect shit!* It might not be the best pep talk, but he's all nerves and manic energy at this point, so Will can forgive himself for not having a better motivating speech prepared. *It's not like I ever needed one. If Jack wasn't there breathing down my neck and demanding answers that I didn't have then I had Hannibal there, gently teasing the answers out of me.*

But they aren't here now. *And the Hannibal I knew might be gone forever. This is on me.*

Now that he's closer he presses up against the wall and stands on his tiptoes, peering through the heavy window. At first it's hard to make out anything at all. The room is only partially lit and large enough that it's difficult to make out everything within.

There's an uncomfortable looking set of couches and chairs, heavy wooden tables littered with refuse. It takes him a moment to realize that there are men in there too, deposited throughout the room as though they fell where they stood. *But are they alive?* Will holds his breath, watching with his whole heart in his mouth until finally one of the men grunts and rolls over on the floor, clearly drunk and oblivious to the desperate stranger outside the window.

He could weep from relief, if he only had that luxury. *These must be them. The men who stole Mischa from Hannibal.*

He'd say he was growing inexplicably angry at the sight of these men, clearly passed out after drinking heavily, but Will knows better. There's nothing *inexplicable* about his anger at all.

These men. These stinking, barbaric monsters had hurt his alpha. Had shamed him and broken him in ways that no one else could have. They'd murdered a little girl. Killed her and fed her to her brother like she was meat. *As though they had any right at all.*

Men like this brought out the fury in Will. The long-buried *other* that wanted nothing more than to vanquish them. To bring them justice and blood and terror. *Just like the Dragon.* And he had every intention of doing just that, the moment he found out where Hannibal and Mischa were. *Because they had to be alive. It would be too cruel otherwise.* Will had ripped a hole in the fabric of the world in order to get here. *He couldn't be too late. He couldn't.*

Stepping away from the wall, grimly determined, Will headed towards the back of the house.

---

He managed to wriggle in through a half-open window in the study, dismissing the rather appealing idea of barging through the front door for the idiocy it was. Creeping towards the door he can hear snoring up ahead, smell their alpha stink. Judging from the state of the house, and from the food still present on the table, Will guesses that their arrival is fairly new.

Stumbling outside he'd happened upon the corpse of a man. High cheekbones, the kind of jaw you could cut glass with, dark hair. Hannibal's father. He hadn't gone quickly, but Will didn't spend any time digging him out from the snow once he saw his face. *He isn't important, Hannibal would not grieve for him.*

That meant it was possible that Hannibal's mother lived still, but he doubted it. The trials Hannibal and Mischa faced had been endured alone, before she was taken. Will was sure of that. *I have to find Hannibal. And Mischa... please, I can't be too late. I've come so far.* Off the edge of a cliff and in to madness itself. *I need him.*

Carefully, Will makes his way from the study towards the kitchen, eyeing the men as he does so, unable to believe that they are there at all. Crooked and monstrous but still so painfully *human*. Six men, entirely unaware of the fact that together they would birth a monster. Be the catalyst that would create so much chaos and beauty and destruction. A world baptized in blood, in Mischa's image.

Part of him hopes they wake. That he can hurt them. But that's a very small part, one stubbornly ignoring his present size and capabilities. None of them move as he slinks past, wrinkling his nose in disgust at the smell.

Even before he enters the kitchen he clocks it for what it is: decay. Something, some*one*, has died in there. His heart just about stops before he reminds himself that the soldiers snoring behind him haven't reached the point of desperation just yet. Cruelty and starvation haven't given them their claws. *It will, given time, but I won't let that happen.*

He prepares himself for the sight of Hannibal's mother, sprawled out on the floor, staring up sightlessly at the ceiling. Her dress is rucked up past her waist and her throat is torn out... it's a grisly find. Not the worst he's ever seen, but tragic nevertheless.

Will wonders what pushed the alphas to kill their omega captive but doesn't take the time to re-create the scene for himself. He doesn't need to know, though he does allow himself a moment to right her dress. It's the least he can offer.

To the left is a pantry door. From his explorations before, he remembers that there's a cellar just beyond that, tucked up under the house. The same cellar he'd strung up Chiyoh's captive in. He doesn't know *how* he knows, just that he is absolutely certain that Hannibal and Mischa are below. *Hannibal would have found it fitting, to keep him there.*

Hating himself for his hope, and his fear, and every other emotion that's threatening to overwhelm him, Will gingerly works the door open and makes his way to the trapdoor that leads to the cellar. *This is it.* He takes a deep, trembling breath before pulling it open.

Though there is silence below, heavy and unfathomable, Will is unafraid. Because down those stairs he can smell his mate. *Hannibal*. And something beyond that, something soft and fragile. He moves with care, leaving the pantry door open in order to banish some of the gloom, not looking up until he reaches the bottom of the stairs.

And that is where he finds them. Half-starved, chained to a wall, but alive. *Both* of them.

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*It isn't him.*

Will knows that, even in the murky darkness of the cellar. *It isn't Hannibal.* But he still speaks, struck by the very sight of him. Of *them*. "Hannibal." He looks so young, impossibly so. There are still traces of baby fat around his chin and cheeks, though clearly whatever they've gone through since the arrival of the men upstairs has whittled away pieces of him. Already changing him. "You're alive."

Hannibal never liked it when the obvious was stated, but Will can't find any other words. It's all he can think, all he can hope to say. *You're alive. You're alive and here. And she is too, your beloved Mischa. And I'm so fucking happy. But it hurts. Because you're not here, not really.*

He wants to cry. Because it's Hannibal and he's alive and unbloodied, and it's Mischa. Mischa whole and untouched by the vicious hands of fate. A pale girl with round eyes and dirty, butter-yellow hair, suddenly so real to him that in that moment he almost can't cope with her existence. Because it's beautiful.

Yet Will doesn't miss the way Hannibal tilts his head slightly, bird-like. Acknowledging Will but very clearly not understanding the language he speaks. Will struggles to contain himself, to keep from weeping in relief because he knows that right now, Hannibal is dangerous to him. More dangerous than he's ever been with tiny Mischa curled up against his side, breathing softly. *Alive*.

*And he naturally doesn't understand a damn word out of my mouth.*

"I'm going to help you." Will holds his hands up, doing his best to seem non-threatening as he assesses the situation, moving a little closer so that he can see what they're working with. There's a heavy manacle around Hannibal's neck, cinched there tightly. Too tight. More circle his wrists and ankles. Mischa is also chained, once around her waist - too small to be held by the other restraints.

He advances on soft feet, making sure to approach the side where Mischa is not and trying not to think about how much faster Hannibal is going to be now that he's younger and has something to protect. Will's hands are still up in the air, eyes watching warily for any small movement as his heart flutters wildly in his chest.

Once he's just outside of reach - close, but not close enough that Hannibal can grab him - he shakily points to the collar around Hannibal's neck. He then touches his own neck before pointing at the collar again. *May I touch you there?*

For a heartbeat, nothing happens, and Will feels despair creeping around the edge of things. Threatening to disarm him with the idea that Hannibal is not only a stranger to him, but won't be able to understand him the way he once did. But the moment passes and Hannibal nods, once. Strange, that they can still speak without words, decades before they've really met. But relieving.

Will kneels in the dirt and gently feels at the metal, finding it sturdy and heavy. Iron, probably. He might be able to pry it open with time, but the key would be easier. Quicker too. He presses a hand against the lock itself, meeting Hannibal's eyes. *Where is the key?*

Hannibal looks up the stairs, growls softly. *They have it.*

Will follows his gaze, sighing heavily to himself. *Of course they do.*

He knows that he's still in a child's body, but part of him also knows that those men won't care if they wake to find an omega in their midst. *Another one*, he amends in his head, glancing at Mischa from the corner of his eyes.

Still.

With a heart heavy with the idea of leaving them behind - even for a moment, a single, solitary *second* - Will stands up straight and heads back to the stairs, pausing only once to look at Hannibal, to steel himself for what he needs to do and trying not to let it hurt that Hannibal looks at him with curiosity, but that's it.

*He doesn't know me.*

---

Their drunken snoring is abrasive to his sensitive ears, and their scent... he forgot what it was like, to be young and small and compelled by instincts he hasn't learned to control. Though Will mentally has learned to cope, spent years and years learning to master himself, his body is fighting him every step of the way.

It takes more effort than he'd expected to stay calm and approach six strange alphas that he knows, down to his *bones*, are a threat to him. His instincts are demanding that he run, that he escapes before they get him and hurt him, but Will Graham isn't a slave to biology and isn't about to stop fighting that now.

The largest man, clearly the leader, is the most obvious choice for possessing the keys and Will's hunch is proven correct - there's a shiny ring of them on the table next to him, half-covered in wasted food.

Seeing that makes Will angry. Furious, even. He wants to grab the plate of chicken bones and smash it on the man's unsuspecting face. Here they are, careless while their food rots, and in a month they will be killing a little girl to fill their bellies.

*Filthy fucking bastards.*

Carefully, hardly breathing, Will grabs the keys and makes his way back to the kitchen, resisting his darker impulses in the face of what's important: getting Mischa and Hannibal free. But even as he crosses the threshold in to the kitchen, he knows violence is on the horizon.

Behind him, he can hear one of the men startle awake, obviously spotting Will before he darts out of sight and shouting something rough and foreign to Will's ears.

*Fuck.*

Will runs.

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact: I actually hate the title of this story, but I didn't know what else to call it and now it's just stuck.

IT'S NOT HANNIBAL. I KNOW. I FEEL ONE BAD ABOUT IT.

But on the bright side, if I'm not a sloth loser, there will be another version of this AU where it IS Hannibal. Because. Reasons. That's the ultimate goal anyway, but I can't promise anything.

Also I do want to apologize for the quality of this. We had to put our two dogs to sleep the other day and I'm still pretty upset about it. But I wanted to get this out because I promised, and ya'll needed to meet Baby Teenager Hannibal. Even if he doesn't do much yet, ha.

Also also you're welcome for not leaving you on the cliffhanger of "both of them" like I originally wanted to because I'm occasionally the worst sort of person.

# In This Nightmare

Chapter Notes

> This chapter is getting posted a little early because I've got a full day tomorrow. It also didn't want to be written, at all, but I'm done struggling with it. So I apologize that the quality is lacking, still having a bit of a hard time.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Strange to think that his life could be so changed, and so quickly, all in the matter of an hour. One moment Hannibal is tucked away in the living room, sitting by Mischa's side as she fumbles through her primer, and the next... he is an orphan, held hostage underneath his very home, bound by iron, like something from the fairytale stories Mischa loved so much.

They'd come after dark, in that hazy time before they drifted off to sleep. The venerable Count Lecter was sitting in his favorite wingback chair by the fire, smoking and staring at the dancing flames. Brooding, as he often did. Their mother, Simonetta, was in the kitchen finishing up the last of the dishes, having refused Hannibal's offer of assistance so that he might read with Mischa instead. She always listened better when it was her beloved brother doing the teaching, gently coaxing the words from her lips even as she frowned and insisted she could do it herself. His patience for the darling little girl was endless - and the only thing that kept his parents from outright fearing his potential, he knew.

And then it had happened. Screeching from outside, loud and unnatural. Their father looked out in confusion, standing and going to the window to see if he might be able to place the sounds themselves. But the heavy snow masked whoever it was that might be lurking at their doorstep.

Without a word, he made his way to the front of the house and Hannibal felt compelled to follow him. "Mischa, pet, stay here a moment." He kissed the top of her golden head and was already preparing to argue against investigating the sounds when his father opened the front door.

"Stay, Hannibal." His tone offered little option but obedience, though it grated on him to be commanded like a dog.

Hannibal felt uneasy about the situation, certain that they were inviting something very dangerous in to their home. *He shouldn't have gone outside. There's something wrong.* Behind him he felt the presence of his mother, drying her hands on a towel. "Hannibal, what is that noise? Where is your father?"

"Outside." The word is tersely spoken, a monotone that doesn't betray his feelings in any way. Instead of elaborating Hannibal goes to Mischa, instincts telling him that they needed to

leave, now. Before the shell of violence cracked around them all. Yet even as he was gathering her up in his arms the front door burst open and he heard his mother gasp.

He could smell her fear. And more. *That's blood.*

"Who... who are you?"

"Well look at you, lovely, lovely thing." The voice was rough, and cruel. Icy fingers of dread were already snaking down Hannibal's spine because he could feel it: it was too late. Whatever chance they might have had, it was gone now. This fact was hammered home by his mother's sudden scream and the appearance of six, gruff, filthy alphas in the doorway.

They looked upon Hannibal and Mischa boldly, with covetous eyes, and he could see a splash of blood on the leader's jacket, wet against the dark green. "Hello little alpha." The man's mouth is a thin line, a smug sort of smirk that made Hannibal want to growl. He resisted only because he would not give them the satisfaction of wringing a response from him, no matter what they did. *Pigs*.

"Where's my Papa?" Little Mischa had no such reservations, stubbornly peeking out from behind Hannibal.

"He's gone. But don't worry, we're going to look after you now."

More screams from the hallway, the tearing of clothes. "Cover your ears, Mischa."

The man's smile widened.

---

What followed was brutal, but quick. Hannibal and Mischa were escorted upstairs - past their poor mother who was... Hannibal didn't dare think of it. He needed to be calm, to be in control. To lose himself would be a fatal error and he couldn't afford to be so careless, not with Mischa counting on him. Since then they'd been fed once a day, kept locked in the nursery. Their mother was painfully absent though he could hear her sobbing, sometimes.

Within him, like a lurching sea, Hannibal could feel the darkest parts of him coming to life. Growing at an alarming rate. He'd always known he was different than the people who surrounded him, that there was something in him that was feral and wild, but his parents had been so careful to conceal that from the world, constantly reminding him of how important it was that he not become an animal. That he be civilized, even if it wasn't real. *Think of it as play-acting, Hannibal. Like a game.* His mother had been pregnant at the time, and understandably afraid for the life she carried. *But why, Mother?*

She'd pursed her lips, sighing heavily before brushing the hair back from his head. *Because if you don't, men will come and take you away. You have to be better than the animal inside. Show that you are not a slave to those instincts.* Strangely, at that moment there was a kick in her side, something Hannibal felt. It was the first time the baby had moved and he'd tentatively put his hands to her belly. *She kicked!* Before then he hadn't really given much

thought one way or another towards having a sibling, but that moment changed him. Such a small thing, to be so profound.

When Mischa had been born they'd been afraid he'd hurt her - senselessly, as he had adored the wide-eyed girl from the moment he held her. *Sweet girl, the light of his world.* For Mischa he pretended, wore a carefully cultivated persona so that others would never guess what he thought in the privacy of his mind. His parents knew better, of course, but there was an easy peace in the house regardless, sealed by a mutual love for the little omega among them.

And now she was being threatened.

Hannibal didn't know why, initially, but two days ago they'd been brought downstairs, one of the alphas trying to coax smiles from Mischa while their mother cooked across the room, absolutely drained of all life. They were both hungry and Mischa had cried well in to the night because her belly ached, but now she refused the sweets the man offered her, curling in to Hannibal's side defiantly. As though she knew he was nothing but corruption and wanted no part of it.

The appalling man had been angry, had left them alone for just enough time that Simonetta Lecter blinked back to life, if only for long enough to shove them both out the door. "Run. Take her and run Hannibal. Save her." There'd been no appeals for him to save himself, but he hadn't needed them. Hannibal would survive. It was in his nature and she knew it well.

Unfortunately, Grutas had chosen that moment to come in to the kitchen, shouting as Hannibal made a dash for the woods, half-dragging Mischa behind him. Their mother blocked the door, trying so hard to give them a fighting chance. But Grutas shoved her down easily and the alphas spilled out in to the night, hollering again at the unexpected chase they found themselves partaking in. Delighting in the possibility for violence.

Mischa struggled to follow Hannibal, and he finally picked her up in hopes that they could move faster, but there was little use. He knew they were defeated even before Grutas and the others caught up to them, beating Hannibal down and dragging them both back to the house and down in to the dark cellar. He was too weak to fight back, even as they chained them both up like animals.

Grutas had forbidden the others from seeing them, which meant safety for Mischa... but how long would it last? Hannibal had been steadily watching their dwindling supplies, watching in disgust as the alphas casually let food go to waste without a thought as to when it would run out. Eventually, they were going to get hungry. And then what?

---

The sliver of light is an unwelcome intrusion. But Hannibal can smell someone up there, and not one of the alphas holding him captive. *Omega*. Quiet steps bring whoever it is closer. In the low light it's hard to see him, but it's clear that he is young. Very young. And afraid, but composed despite it.

And he says Hannibal's name.

That in itself is startling, but he shows very little of that on his face, too focused on what this might mean. The boy could very well be a threat, or a useful distraction. Given the choice, he thinks the men upstairs would take this omega to pieces before they'd bother with Hannibal or Mischa. He's about to say something, to hopefully coax the boy in to helping, when he speaks again, the tongue foreign.

He almost wonders if this is a dream. Surely it can't be reality that a lovely, big-eyed faunlet of an omega is there with them in this nightmare. Especially not when he sounds so strange and looks so very *moved* by the sight of them, dirty and chained. As though he'd seen the very grail of life itself.

"I'm going to help you." His intentions are clear, even if the words themselves are not, and he mimics touching the collar. Hannibal wonders if maybe the men brought the boy there with him, another captive. His touch is gentle as he feels around the lock, testing it's strength. He seems to understand that the lock isn't a complex mechanism, but it'll require more time to open than they probably have.

When the boy looks at him, Hannibal can understand him without the need for words. The boy wants to find the key, to uncage him. It's probably survival instinct compelling him to find an alpha to protect him from the others, but Hannibal doesn't much care why he's been offered help. What matters is escaping with Mischa.

Wondering if the boy will even understand, he looks upstairs. The last time he'd seen the ring of keys Grutas had thrown them on the table among the litter and refuse. The boy nods once, almost to himself, gathering himself up in order to face the gauntlet. It's almost extraordinary. Hannibal has met few omegas, if any, willing to enter the bear pit as this one has just done.

*Interesting boy.*

---

He darts to the cellar as fast as he can and throws the keys to the bottom of the stairs, "Mischa!" his voice is loud, high and afraid. But he's hoping that the girl can slip the manacle around her waist and free her brother. Until then, he needs to buy them time. Will slams the door shut and goes to the counter, grabbing a knife from the butcher's block just as two of the men come barreling in the room, furious and viciously pleased to have caught another mouse in their trap. They're talking to him, low, rough things he's grateful not to understand. He doesn't need the words to know what it is they're saying about him as another enters the room. And another.

*Just breathe. Mischa will get the keys. She'll free Hannibal and then...*

What? There's every possibility that Hannibal will escape with Mischa and leave Will to face the wrath of these butchers alone. Yet it doesn't hurt, to think of Hannibal leaving him. *That isn't my Hannibal.* But Will can't think about that. About the burning ache in his chest or the abandonment he feels knowing just how alone he is now. Instead he faces them with all the courage he has, baring his teeth in a quiet growl.

The ringleader seems amused by his audacity, gesturing crudely to the others before stepping forward. It's clear he's asking will for the knife, holding his hand out in expectation. Like *hell*. Will steps back, playing scared, playing nervous. *Come on you big bastard, underestimate me. I dare you.*

Predictably, he does, wariness melting away as he walks forward, clearly thinking he's just going to take the knife from Will. *Mistake number one, asshole.*

Without hesitation Will leaps forward and slashes at the man's abdomen. The wound isn't as deep as he'd like - he's not strong enough to deal out the damage he used to - but the man stumbles backwards, startled but quickly furious. Will doesn't allow him time to think. Using his smaller size to his advantage he slides underneath the burly alpha, stabbing at his inner thigh before coming up behind him and shoving hard.

The other alphas seem stunned by this development, but anger is catching and two of them come after him now. Drunk, but not as drunk as he could wish. The lankier one with the hooked nose snarls and grabs Will's arm while the another reaches for his hair. Will kicks and scratches and bites... things begin to blur. It's so hard focus on anything but attacking every bare inch of skin he can.

He's at a disadvantage and he knows it.

An arm grabs him around the middle and throws him across the room and he lands with a heavy thud, knocking the breath right out of his lungs. It's hard to see with little black dots fluttering across his vision, but he'd rather not see everything. Not when six enraged men are all converging on him... and he can see Hannibal behind them, sister in his hands, not looking back as he dashes out the door.

---

"Mischa!" A clatter of keys land in the dirt at the base of the stairs. Hannibal can see them glitter briefly before the door is slammed shut. *Cunning boy.* He doesn't question how or why the boy seems to know them both. The important thing is that the keys are there.

"Darling? Mischa, my sweet?"

" 'annibal?" Her eyes blink open, settling at half-mast. She's so cold, so hungry and tired and thin. He needs to get her away from this place.

"Sweet girl, I need you to wriggle out of these chains. The keys are at the bottom of the stairs and if you can get them for me we can go upstairs. Won't that be nice?" He feels more than sees her frown. She's managed to free herself before, for brief periods, but the metal chafes against her skin and he knows she's so tired. "If you do I promise you can meet someone special, a new friend."

There's a brief pause, a hint of stubbornness. "Like the bad men?"

"No, not like them, dearest. He's an omega. But he needs my help before the bad men get him. Will you help?"

Mischa pauses for a moment before nodding resolutely. Hardly five, but she's so very precious to him. And so brave. It takes her a few long moments to free herself, shimmying her narrow hips through the pitted iron before crawling across the floor, feeling around with her hands while chaos breaks out upstairs.

Hannibal is tense. The odds aren't good that the little omega will come out of this intact. Grutas howls just as the tinkle of keys reaches him. *Mischa's found them!*

His dear sister happily comes back to him with her prize. "I found them Hannibal!"

"Wonderful! Such a good job, you wonderful girl." Quickly Hannibal takes the keys and unlocks the restraints, pausing only to kiss the top of her beloved head. He hopes she doesn't understand what is happening just beyond the cellar, Grutas cursing their unlikely savior most colorfully even as Hannibal scoops her up in his arms and makes his way towards the fight. "Keep your eyes shut now, pet. Nice and tight."

Trustingly she does just that. At the landing Hannibal cracks open the door, watching as the little omega fights like he's possessed. It's distracting, and enthralling to see. He's positively feral, ripping out a chunk of the disgusting Milko's arm even as Provik rips back the boys hair.

Hannibal begins to cross the room, keeping close to the wall. They're all so focused on the boy they don't notice him at all. He's reached the door when Grutas comes up behind the fighting omega and hurls him across the wall. He lands hard - hard enough that another man might have winced in sympathy. But Hannibal turns away from the scene, more determined than ever to get Mischa to safety.

He runs out in to the storm and is immediately buffeted by wind and stinging snow on all sides. Mischa cries out, already freezing in her too thin nightgown. Distantly Hannibal can see the barn ahead and makes his way across the yard, moving as quickly as he can. The horses are dead, he knows that. But there's an old motorcycle in the back that he just might be able to use to get them far away.

Mischa is crying in his arms, alarmed by the cold and the screaming coming from the house. It's horrible, that sound. Sharp and piercing before being brutally cut off.

The sudden silence makes Hannibal pause for a moment before continuing on. *Whoever you were, thank you.*

Chapter End Notes

...I'm not even sorry about the cliffhanger.

# Madness Follows

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will is dizzy, gasping for air as the bloodied alpha picks him up by the scruff of the neck, shaking him violently and screaming all kinds of (probably horrible) things in his face. That the little omega refuses to respond at all only seems to goad the man further, but Will doesn't care. He knows they want him afraid, but he won't give them that. Not in a million years. Somewhere in the back of his mind Hannibal's voice whispers: *Atta boy*.

Still, it must be said that facing down death at the hands of these men isn't as terrifying as he'd expected. No doubt Hannibal and his band of merry murderers has numbed him to the idea... but that isn't all of it. The idea that he's *saved* Hannibal, perhaps in more ways than one, is an overwhelming concept. Especially coming so fresh on the heels of what happened on the cliff.

With Mischa alive, there's no telling what Hannibal will grow in to now, what shape his darkness might take. Will might have actually pulled it off, finally done what Jack always wanted: saved every man and woman that the Chesapeake Ripper ever killed. There's a certain poetry to it, of his grand becoming *not* lying in death and chaos after all. Maybe he's still not the monster Hannibal wanted him to be. Maybe, just maybe, Will Graham is still there, *somewhere*. He can find peace in that, accept what comes next with dignity because he's still *himself*.

That said, Will isn't going to just roll over and die. He's too stubborn for that. *If Hannibal couldn't break me no one can*. The thought spurs him to action, blood-slick hands grabbing at the alpha's head before digging his thumbs in to the man's eyes, viciously gouging at them.

The man - Grutas, that's what they're all yelling now in varying levels of confusion and horror - tugs at Will's body in an effort to pry him off but Will isn't budging and doubles down on his efforts, gritting his teeth as Grutas stumbles backwards, screaming and screaming. One of the men finally gathers himself enough to backhand Will hard enough that he goes flying away from Grutas, the mangled remains of the man's eyes dripping from his hands.

Despite himself Will is whimpering. *Fuck, that hurt.*

On the ground he can see one of his milk teeth, nestled in a smear of blood.

Fucking *great*.

Two of the men grab him now, easily overpowering him and staying clear of his sharp little teeth. At this point there is no underestimating him. *I had a good run, while it lasted. Good thing these bastards are dumb.* The other three are kneeling next to Grutas, offering clumsy assistance, but Will knows there's nothing they can do for him now. He'll never see again.

*Good*.

Grutas shouts something and the arm twisted behind Will's back gets pulled up even tighter until something finally snaps. He hates himself for it, but Will screams at the pain. It hurts so bad. His lungs are burning and dimly he wonders if he has any broken ribs. Not that it matters. Hook Nose has grabbed the knife up from the floor and is holding it to Will's throat, not caring that he's drawn blood, screaming in his face.

Will spits blood at him.

*This is it*. The man leans back, angry and offended, before sinking the knife in to Will's shoulder. He can't get away no matter how hard he struggles, the other man is holding him too tightly, and the alphas are all getting excited by his struggling and the blood. One of them smells slightly of arousal, and that's worse than the pain.

*I'll make them kill me before it comes to that.*

He's struggling again, silent and ignoring the blazing fire that's his dangling, useless arm, when the door opens again.

It's the most beautiful thing he's ever seen.

"Hannibal."

---

When they reach the barn Hannibal quiets Mischa and covers her in a horse blanket before setting off towards the back of the barn where the motorcycle is normally kept under a tarp... only to growl in frustration because it's gone. One of the men must have taken it, or hidden it away. *Possibly after we nearly escaped.* Grutas isn't stupid, after all. Which means that they have no means of immediate escape.

Perhaps he only wanted an excuse to do what he'd wanted to do since the moment those men entered his home: to tear out their unworthy throats. To feed upon them like the animals they are. Not because he was angry or hurt, no, but because they dared to terrorize what he considered his. They were vulgar and coarse and they had threatened the only thing in the world that mattered to him. And that was unforgivable.

"Mischa, Mischa I need to go and help our friend now, okay?"

Her eyes are wide and wet with fear, but she is a strong girl. She doesn't ask him to stay with her.

"I want you to hide in the hay, can you do that? Of course you can, my smart girl." He's helping her cover herself up, knowing the smell will mask her scent if Grutas and his men come looking. "Now, listen carefully. If I don't come back-" He holds a hand up against her whimpered protest. "If I don't return by the time the big hand on that clock reaches the ten, I want you to go to town. You remember the way, through the woods?"

She nods. He wants to believe her, but knows that in this storm she will likely become lost attempting such a thing.

But hypothermia is a kinder death than what the alphas in his home would give to her.

"Very good, Mischa. I promise I'll do my best to come back for you. But the bad men might stop me and you can't let them get you, no matter what. Do you promise?" He holds his breath, watching as she gives it all the careful consideration that a five year old child can.

"I promise, Hannibal."

Before he can change his mind, Hannibal heads back out in to the storm, briefly regretting that he hadn't assisted the omega earlier. With two it would have been easier to take on the half-drunk alphas. Still, Hannibal knows that they will at least be injured now, if nothing else. The stranger's sacrifice was not in vain.

But as he comes upon the house he can see that, against all odds, the boy still lives. He's bleeding badly, one of his arms is broken, dangling limply, and his face is already beginning to bruise, but he's alive. *Remarkable*.

Hannibal knows there's an axe leaning against the inside of the door, there for chopping firewood. He carefully wraps a hand around it before making his way in to the room. Most of the men with Grutas are lean, wiry alphas, and wholly focused on the injured boy. But they've been drinking heavily since they arrived, eating everything in sight, and he knows that he has an advantage over them even without his determination to protect his sister with all of his fierce courage.

He swings the axe in to the neck of the closest man, announcing his arrival rather neatly. The boy has said his name again, surprised and awed, and Hannibal can feel his eyes on him as he smoothly moves to the next man, sidestepping a wild swing before bringing the axe down on the man's arm.

Though it's very sharp, it doesn't slice completely through, but it thankfully doesn't lodge itself in the bone and Hannibal pulls it back before swinging again - this time cleanly severing the man's spinal cord at the neck.

Madness follows.

He's finally done it, the one thing his father always warned him against doing. His parents both seemed aware of his detachment from the world, had even been afraid he might harm Mischa before realizing how he adored her. Both had done everything they could to convince Hannibal of right and wrong, to keep him contained here away from those he might harm. And instead the world had come to him, begging to be hurt, and who was he to deny it?

It felt good. Hurting these worthless alphas. Hunting them. At some point the omega had been dropped to the ground but instead of slinking away to safety, abandoning Hannibal as he'd been similarly abandoned, the boy re-enters the fray: only this time he's snared the pistol

from Kolnas belt and has begun to drop the hostile alphas one by one.

Though it must be said, either he has poor aim or he's intentionally maiming them rather than finishing them straight off. Hannibal isn't sure he can believe the former, not when he watches a bullet enter so perfectly in Porvik's knee that it nearly comes apart at the joint.

Eventually, the men are all down, dead or dying still.

The omega boy is shivering uncontrollably, bloodied and suddenly looking very overwhelmed by what has occurred. Strangely, Hannibal doesn't think it's the death itself that has shaken him so badly. He almost seems... euphoric? It pulls him near, wanting to examine the unusual creature a bit more closely than he has, wondering if he's next on the omega's agenda now that the main threat has been neutralized.

He doesn't expect the small creature to fling himself against Hannibal's waist, holding him tightly with the arm that isn't useless. "Hannibal." The way he says the word, it's almost like a prayer. The only one he knows.

Hannibal finds himself holding the boy, without ever really considering why.

Chapter End Notes

DID YOU REALLY THINK HANNIBAL WOULD LEAVE WILL? I ain't that mean. I will cliffhanger you to death, but there's gonna be some Hannigram all up in here.

# Here's To Hoping

Chapter Notes

I want to say thank you to a-flickering-star on tumblr for helping beta this! SERIOUSLY YOU ARE A LIFESAVER YOU PERFECT HUMAN YOU. Any mistakes are definitely mine and probably added after said beta-reading because I cannot help myself when it comes to fiddling with things. Also I have fake nails on right now so typos probably happened, sorry! (I can't wait to take the dang things off, but there's one more day of comic fest so I must suffer for the sake of cosplay.)

ANYWAY, important note about when people are talking:

Italics - Lithuanian
Normal Text - English
BOLD - French (both Fancy and Bastardized)

They hold one another for some time in the aftershocks of the moment, absorbing the enormity of it in silence. The omega boy is shuddering against him but otherwise seems fairly content - it's rare to encounter another that is comfortable with quiet, who feels no need to fill the air with empty, meaningless words. Hannibal might have been able to stay there with him well in to the night, soaking in the violence, had it not been for Mischa. He worried about leaving her alone for much longer and it's that thought that has him gently pulling away from the boy burrowed against his side. *"I must get my sister from the barn. I won't be long."* Though they've established that they do not share a language Hannibal feels compelled to offer some explanation so as not to appear rude.

Yet as he turns to leave he's stopped most insistently - a small, bloody hand clinging to his sleeve.

Instinct tells him to growl, to establish control by shoving the boy down and making him submit, but Hannibal has been carefully trained in the art of patience and refuses to behave in such an unbecoming manner. Instead he raises an eyebrow in question, wondering what it is the omega wants. "You're covered in blood. She's just a baby... we need to clean up." The words themselves are meaningless, though there's a honeyed edge to them that Hannibal enjoys. A certain blurriness that confirms it's not an accent he's ever encountered. The omega sighs heavily, clearly frustrated. "Right. You don't understand me. Because this is my life. Awesome."

He sounds strange, the words all chopped up and stressed in a way Hannibal can't make much sense of. He wonders if stress is affecting the boy more then he is letting on, but after a minute of deliberation he seems to give up on words entirely, settling for tugging on Hannibal's sleeve again as he steps towards the sink - unmindful of the bodies littering the

floor.

When their eyes meet again Hannibal can see the mounting frustration there, swirling together with hurt and hope and... *he is a kaleidoscope of feeling, this boy*. Yet his purpose is clear as Hannibal understands what he is trying to achieve: they need to wash away the blood before retrieving Mischa.

That he didn't consider it himself is irritating, but unsurprising. Often Hannibal forgets how much he deviates from the norm, how very *other* he is compared to those around him, until he's pressed in to an occasion like this and then it's painfully clear. *At least the boy doesn't seem to hold it against me. Strange that he's so calm after so much violence, it's almost unnerving. Any other omega would be weeping openly, if not lying catatonic on the floor.*

The matter settled, Hannibal obediently follows the boy to the big farmhouse sink, scrubbing away the blood and flecks of gore as quickly as possible. He's focused on the time, concerned that Mischa might choose to leave the safety of the barn sooner then he'd told her as she's a stubborn creature, at times, so it's a relief when the stranger beside him hurries as well despite the difficulties his left arm is presenting.

Ordinarily Hannibal might have offered to take a look, having an interest in anatomy and medicine, but the omega does not ask and instead surprises him by palpitating around the wound, carefully feeling the joint. Whatever he feels seems to confirm something for him because he grimly pops it back in to place. It's a deceptively gentle movement, leaning to the side and rotating back and then up, but Hannibal can hear the moment it slots back to where it belongs even if the boy's only reaction to the pain is a small wince.

Strange to flinch at that, when Hannibal has flinched at so little in his life.

---

When they're as clean as they possibly can be under the time restraint - Will doesn't know where Mischa is, but he doubts Hannibal left her without some sort of plan in place - he follows Hannibal out in to the burning cold.

Initially the alpha had paused in the doorway, frowning at him, and it just... Will had the horrible urge to laugh, because it was so *Hannibal*, wanting to politely allow his guest to remain inside where it was warm while he tended to his sister. Nevermind that there are seven corpses inside and the guest doesn't speak the same language.

In the end, Hannibal's objections fell to the wayside and he didn't hesitate further, making his way towards a large barn near the back of the property. Honestly, Will wishes he'd at least slow down, because every step is jarring to his recently dislocated shoulder, and the stab wound, and his ribs... but he can understand that Hannibal is worried for his sister. Especially after everything they'd just endured.

Warm light spills out through the cracked door from some kind of lantern. Will isn't sure if Hannibal left it for the girl or if she found it on her own, but he's glad for it when they step out of the wind. Without it, he might have not seen the blanket half buried in the straw.

Hannibal approaches the pile with a fond, open smile, crouching down and holding out a hand. *"Did the dark frighten you, my sweet girl? I'd have left you a light if you had asked me."* The gentleness in his tone is surreal, as is seeing him interact with his beloved sister. Will didn't think Hannibal was capable of such indulgence.

*"You had to go help the omega boy, and I'm not scared of the dark! I wanted you to find me in the snow. Like a lighthouse."* She sounds like a bird: sleepy voice all soft chirps and friendly trills. Watching her crawl out of the hay and into her brother's arms makes Will's throat tight again. It's still so impossible to see them together: for her to be alive at all.

Shifting his weight, Hannibal turns until he's facing Will again, precious bundle in hand. It's the first time Will has really seen her, and she's so lovely. She *glows*. Even as she shifts to face her brother, suddenly stern and admonishing, there is a sharp sweetness to her, a fierce courage. *I can see how losing her would break someone so completely. "Hannibal!"* Her little fox-ish face scrunches up in to a frown. *"He is hurt! And you made him walk in the snow. That's not manners."*

*"Forgive me, Mischa, but he insisted. He wanted to meet you."*

Mischa wriggles impatiently until Hannibal sets her down, and then she comes careening over to him, barely skidding to a stop before they collide. When she drops into a delicate curtsy, whatever lingering hesitation Will felt about loving her is gone - how can he not love her? She is the best of Hannibal, and she reminds him so much of Abigail. Of himself. *"Hello!"*

Though he cannot understand her, Will is very adept at reading body cues, and only an idiot wouldn't grasp an introduction.

Carrying on with her mock formalness, he manages to execute a bow with only a minimal show of pain, wincing as he straightens again, and it's worth it, just to see her eyes light up. "Hello, Mischa."

She turns her golden head back to her brother, clapping in delight. *"He sounds so strange Hannibal! Who is he?"*

Lost in the brief interlude, Will almost forgot Hannibal was there, but when he looks up it's clear the same cannot be said for the alpha. He's staring at Will, head tilted in that peculiar way of his, at once so strange and so familiar that it *aches*. *"I'm afraid you'll have to ask him, though he doesn't speak Lithuanian."*

Whatever he says seems to light a challenge in Mischa, because she turns back to Will, pointing at herself. *"I'm Mischa Lecter. I'm a Lady, a real one. Can you say your name?"*

Such pantomime is easy to discern. "Will. Will Graham."

*"Will?"* Her voices practically bubbles, it's so light and airy. He can't imagine how anyone could lock a child up in a cellar, let alone one as precious as her. Will didn't regret killing

those alphas, but he finds grim satisfaction in that fact now.

Smiling, he nods his head and holds out a hand for her to shake, which she does. "Yes, Will."

*"Will."* Hannibal's voice is hardly there at all, soft but so intense. Intrigued, but not fascinated. It reminds him of the early days and a lump forms in his throat. *Stop thinking about it.*

Instead of sinking in to despair Will helps Mischa wrap up snugly in the horse blanket before they journey back to the house. He manages to convince Hannibal - mostly by grabbing his hand and stubbornly not moving while maintaining some intense eye contact - that they should enter through the front door, while also carefully maneuvering them around the spot where he'd half-uncovered the former Count Lecter. He doesn't want to Mischa near the bodies, even if she wouldn't be able to see them, and that's something Hannibal seems to understand with relative ease. *But we're going to need to figure something else out soon. I'm not too keen on playing charades forever.*

They take her upstairs, to what Will guesses is her room, perhaps an old nursery wing. She's already asleep, exhausted after the ordeal she's survived, but hopefully not traumatized. *And if she is, we'll help her. Protect her.* Hannibal is talking to her lowly, in a cadence that reminds Will of the fairytales he'd read as a child, but after it's certain that Mischa won't wake he quietly leaves her side and gestures for Will to follow.

He leads him down the hall to what Will vaguely remembers as a sort of study, maybe an office? So much of the house had been in ruins when he'd visited, or changed by the orphanage, but his guess is proven correct when Hannibal opens the door and reveals the well-appointed room.

Inside it's dark and cold, like much of the house. Apparently the intruders hadn't bothered to use much of the space, content to lie on the living room floor like animals. It makes Will feel briefly grateful that much of the space has been left unviolated even if he doubts Hannibal - even a young Hannibal - would consider any sort of space sacred. Especially not with the invaders dead, their bodies cooling on the floor downstairs.

Hannibal quickly lights a fire with well-practiced ease before pulling an old medical bag out from a cabinet. Will is standing awkwardly in the doorway, hugging his body in order to conserve warmth, but moves towards the fireside when he's beckoned, sitting gingerly on one of the chairs there.

Will feels an echo of all of their previous fireside chats here, like they've stepped back to his timeline, even as he places himself entirely in the other's hands, as he's always done. Trusting - even when he shouldn't be. There's no way of knowing how much knowledge that this version of Hannibal has, after all, and he doesn't know for sure that Hannibal isn't going to turn on him. But Will wouldn't be himself if he didn't rise to the challenge presented to him.

"I don't think I need stitches. Maybe. Do you know how to do stitches? I could probably do it myself, but it's an awkward- fuck!" He's rambling, anxious and nervous because historically his experiences under Hannibal's care haven't been very positive, and thus he's caught off guard when Hannibal pours what feels like pure goddamn alcohol on his stab wound. "That

fucking hurt Hannibal!"

Despite the pain, Will doesn't move, choosing to glare at the man - *boy*? - in question instead. Hannibal has the audacity to smile. *"You're a fierce little wolf, aren't you?"*

"I don't know what you said, but it's probably pretentious because you're a dick." Will huffs, watching as Hannibal inspects the wound. Seeing it now, exposed, it probably does need stitches, given that it went straight through... but Will doesn't want to dwell on that, because he doubts very much that there are painkillers in that bag. "Will I live?"

*"You're very lucky. I don't think it hit anything vital." You'll survive* goes unspoken.

Hannibal gets everything ready before he begins to stitch up Will's arm. They aren't the graceful, perfectly sewn sutures Will is used to seeing, but right now he's just glad that Hannibal has some knowledge and is being quick about it.

While he works, Will has time to study him, to compare all the myriad of ways that this teenage Hannibal differs from the man he... *no, not thinking about it. This is me, not thinking about it.* He also has time to contemplate their language barrier. By the time they'd met Hannibal had spoken a dozen languages - that he knew of - which means there's a good chance that he's multilingual now. The problem is that Will can't speak much of anything aside from butchered French, and most of that is of the Creole variety. *Here's to hoping?*

**"Do you understand French?"**

Though he's clearly surprised Hannibal's hands do not jerk as he looks up. When he speaks, it's with a natural ease, the sound polished and a hundred times more refined then Will's broken Cajun French. **"You're French?"**

**"No."** Will can't help it, he's grinning. Because he could see Hannibal visibly *twitch* at his pronunciation but also because... because he's *missed* him. So much. And even if this isn't the man he knew, it is a form of him, and until this moment, this is the closest they've been since the fall. *Maybe that'll be enough.*

---

It's been two weeks since the reclaiming of the Lecter estate from Grutas and his men. They've spent much of the time healing - Will more so then Hannibal. They dragged the bodies out in to the snow that first night, allowing nature to conceal them in the same way that it had Hannibal's father, and had made quick work of cleaning up the carnage in the kitchen so that when morning came there wasn't a sign left of the men who had so rudely interrupted their lives.

Things should have been peaceful, but Will couldn't help feeling anxious and ill at ease. He was terrified that he'd thumbed his nose at fate and it would find some way to correct the error, to snatch Mischa away from them. The only way to safety that he could think of was getting Hannibal and Mischa to their uncle Robert, but that task was proving difficult.

By now, they'd managed to clumsily figure out how to communicate with one another, either through French or hand gestures when that failed, but Hannibal wasn't grasping Will's sense of urgency. He was hesitant to leave his home, especially when he was certain that his uncle was still stationed in Japan. This morning seemed no different, with Mischa still sleeping they prepared breakfast.

**"We have to go Hannibal."**

A heavy sigh from the stove where Hannibal stood, stirring the last of the eggs. **"Will, I don't understand your obsession-"**

**"We're going to run out of food. Those men... they wasted so much."** It isn't a lie. Every day their stores get lower and lower... and it's too late to re-purpose Grutas and the others. **"It's not safe here either. Anything can happen. More men can come."** Another truth. The country was wildly unstable and Hannibal knew that even if he seemed confident in his ability to deal with a threat, especially now that he had an ally in Will.

**"If anyone threatens my sister I will end them without hesitation."** He hasn't moved, but he's holding the spatula so tightly that his fingers are white. Reminding him of what he'd nearly lost before Will had turned up isn't wise so Will tries a different approach, padding over on bare feet and leaning against him.

**"It'll be safer in a city."** His voice is soft, but insistent.

**"My uncle is in Japan. We'll be homeless."**

*I really wish I had proof to offer him. Somehow saying 'I'm from the future!' doesn't seem like it'll help my case.* **"And if you're wrong?"** Hannibal is silent, considering as he turns off the heat and portions out the eggs on three plates. **"Even if he's not there, we're not helpless. There's valuables we can sell. The embassy might even help you obtain funds that belong to you now that your father is gone."**

Hannibal stills completely. **"How do you know about my father, Will?"** But what he's really asking is much more complicated, and they both know it. *How do you know these things? How do you know me? Who are you? Where are you from?*

Perhaps it isn't fair, but Will doesn't have any real answers that he can give. None that would satisfy, anyway. Instead Will grabs two of the plates and heads to the dining room, feeling like a coward even as he responds. **"I found him in the snow."**

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Will remains very elusive about where he's from. Even now, clearly possessed by the need to protect Mischa (and him, strangely enough) he dances away from the topic with practiced ease, never giving an outright refusal, but denying a straightforward answer all the same. He's a strange boy: a mix of contradictions, at once so gentle and kind, laughing and brushing Mischa's golden hair out, and the next admitting that he dug up the frozen remains of the late Count Lecter without even a hint of unease. Hannibal can't help but want to unravel him. To

know him in his entirety.

The day is almost over before Hannibal picks up their conversation from early this morning. **"And what would you do in the city, Will? Your French is atrocious, even after the lessons I've given you."** It's true, Will sounds *appalling*, all rough grit without any refinement that the language so clearly calls for. It's a mystery just who taught him that sound - but whoever it was, Hannibal sincerely hopes they were shot for such a crime.

Naturally, from his place in front of the fire, looking over an old book from the study, Will merely shrugs. **"I'm smart. I'd figure it out."** He's dismissive of the future, almost as if he has no fears of what might become of him. Yes, he is cunning. And delightfully vicious when the moment calls for it, but he has no sense of self-preservation and it's fascinating to observe. For all his knowledge of the Lecter family, he doesn't seem to understand that Robert will greatly resent having two orphans on his hands... let alone three. There's every chance he'd throw Will out in the gutter and Hannibal finds that impossible to accept. Isn't it better to stay here, in territory that he knows? Where he can look after them all?

*And if they need food... they could...* here is where he loses all train of thought. Darker impulses goading him to something he doesn't think the little omega would accept.

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Finally, Hannibal relents, unable to deny the truth when Will is so doggedly determined to make him face it: if they remain, they'll starve.

Mischa is excited about their upcoming trip, happy to be given small tasks to help them prepare. Together Hannibal and Will manage to gather up most of the valuables that can be easily carried and sold, things like his mother's jewels, as well as what remains of their dwindling food supplies. Once that's done, they set out for Paris.

Initially they were going to take the car Will had arrived in - practically, it made sense. But he was afraid that by now it had been reported stolen or missing. A puncture in the gas tank, sustained during the crash, rendered the point moot, fortunately. Though it didn't stop Hannibal from questioning him about it pretty regularly for several days once Will admitted to knowing where a vehicle was.

That left them with traveling on foot, a venture that took half a day in the snow, but once they reached the village they were able to get train tickets and that hastened their progress a great deal.

It's only on their way back to Paris that it starts to really sink in for him: wherever his Hannibal has gone, it isn't here. Will's alone. *Again*. The despondency eats at him in a way nothing has before, but he holds it in. He can still help *this* Hannibal, be useful to him, and he clings to that idea with tenacity for fear of what he'll do without it.

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The trip is a fairly uneventful one, in the end. They both slept in shifts in order to keep a

close eye on Mischa and by the time the last train pulled in to the station in Paris Hannibal is confident that the right choice had been made. Even if his Uncle is not in the city, Hannibal knows he can find work to support them all until he can properly gain control of his family's assets, which he knows are considerable.

He almost hopes that his Uncle is away, because he's no closer to establishing a reason for Will to remain with them that his Uncle will accept, but that hope is dashed when a well-dressed housekeeper answers the front door of Robert's townhouse. *He's here, just as Will thought he would be.* Hannibal doesn't know the woman but the Lecter looks are distinctive enough that she does not question him, merely leads him to the parlor so that she can fetch his Uncle.

Will shoots him a look that is absolutely *smug*, but Hannibal ignores him, choosing to set his over-tired sister on the sofa where she curls up immediately.

As they wait, Hannibal considers again what he's going to say. He knows that his father and Uncle were by no means close, but informing the man that his brother has died suddenly and violently isn't something he cares to do. *A pity that there is no one else to inform him.* And then there's the matter of Will, who is so very clearly not like them. His bearing and mannerisms speak to him being from a lower class, not to mention the way he speaks. How to explain him?

Of course, there *is* a way, though he doesn't think Will would care for it, which is why Hannibal hasn't bothered to discuss it. If he's completely honest with himself it was a course of action he'd decided upon the moment they bought their tickets to Paris, he'd simply chosen not to acknowledge it until this moment.

Before he can think about it in any depth, his Uncle arrives, his stern face shaded with concern. Given Will's position in the room, Hannibal knows Robert cannot see him. *Yet*. *"Hannibal? Mischa? What are you doing here, where are your parents?"* Concern briefly gives way to disgust as Will comes in to view, but Robert has always been very adept at compartmentalizing and he does so now, cutting to the heart of the matter with a simple look.

*"I'm afraid I have bad news, Uncle. Our parents are no longer of this earth. Soldiers attacked the house - mother helped us hide, and we fled once they had left."* It's just enough of the truth that Hannibal is confident his Uncle will accept it. Even if Mischa later contradicts him, she is young enough that her words won't be taken seriously.

Robert's hand rises to his heart and, for just a moment, he seems sorrowful. Regretful, perhaps, of the things that had occurred between him and his older brother that had led to near estrangement. But then his face becomes a careful mask and he moves closer to Hannibal, the hand on his heart going to his nephew's shoulder instead. *"That's a terrible thing, Hannibal."*

*"Yes, quite. We had to flee the estate."* Though he wants to step back from the touch, Hannibal remains where he his, features carefully schooled to show a sadness he doesn't really feel. *"I am afraid we have no where else to turn."*

*"Terrible business, I can't imagine what you've endured."* Robert tuts to himself, before stepping away. *"You know you're welcome here, Hannibal, both of you. I'll see that you're taken care of."* He pauses, eyes drawn once again to Will, who is uncharacteristically quiet and standing near the window, staring out as though he isn't concerned with what may come next. *"Forgive me, but I'm afraid I don't know your companion."*

Hannibal turns so that he's angled towards Will, holding out his hand and switching to French. **"Will? Would you come here, please?"** While he doesn't roll his eyes, sigh, or stomp over, it's clear to Hannibal that Will would enjoy nothing more then to do all three. Instead he comes to stand by Hannibal's side, waiting to be introduced. **"This is Will, my contracted spouse."** Will positively *freezes* in place and Hannibal pulls him close, as though to emphasis the point. **"My father acquired him shortly before we were attacked."**

**"I see. Hello, my name is Robert Lecter."** Suspicion enters Robert's gaze, even as he takes Will's hand and shakes it, but for now he accepts what Hannibal has told him and calls for them to be set up in the guest room for now. While his back is turned Will takes that moment to kick at Hannibal's shin, but he makes no efforts to correct what has been said.

Overall, Hannibal is pleased with the outcome, though he expects their troubles are far from over.

# Dread and Fury

Chapter Notes

There is a time jump here. Just want ya'll forewarned!.

Again, thanks to a-flickering-star who is an actual angel and puts up with my technical errors like a saint.

Italics - Lithuanian
Normal Text - English
BOLD - French (both Fancy and Bastardized)

Will is now 13, Hannibal is 20, Mischa is 8. Chiyoh is 14, but appears younger.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shortly after their arrival all three of them had been introduced to Robert's new bride, the demure and ever-lovely Lady Murasaki. Graciously she took over their care, providing them with food and fresh clothing, and while Hannibal was whisked away by his uncle in order to begin filling out the necessary paperwork for him to be granted asylum Will and Mischa were left to the lady of the house to guide for them as she saw fit.

In Robert's words: **"Omegas should be left to other omegas, dear. I wouldn't know where to begin with them."**

What she chose to do was outfit them properly, beginning with delicate dresses for Mischa and smart, dapper suits for Will that he disliked even on the best of days. **"You must dress to please your spouse, to show him off in the best light. An omega should always be a credit to their alpha."** Naturally she also made the decision to homeschool them herself, having little else to occupy her free time.

Will hates her. Fucking *despises* her for so many reasons that it's hard for him to even begin untangling them from one another. It's a labyrinth of things, golden twine leading him from her kindness to her frail, swan-like neck, to the way she clings to her honor. One minute he'd swear it was the way she smiled while explaining some intricacy of tea ceremony to him and Mischa, and later Chiyoh, as they all kneeled around the oak coffee table in the sunroom. The next he'd put money on the idea that it was the way she watched Hannibal, dark eyes tracking him across the yard.

He knew it was only her own sense of propriety that kept them apart. Had it been up to Hannibal, they'd have fled into the night, scornful of the world. (If the offer was still on the table, Will wouldn't have second-guessed. Not this time.)

And Robert *knew*. Perhaps not immediately. Hannibal was a very circumspect individual when he wanted to be, and his interest in Lady Murasaki was something that had grown gradually. But once he was certain, he wasted little time in proving his devotion, no doubt earning her own admiration in the process because Hannibal was impossible to resist when he was charming.

Little by little, the relationship that Robert and Murasaki had drifted from ‘neutral politeness’ and settled somewhat in the territory of active disdain and, on her part, fear. Whatever affection Robert may have harbored for his wife dwindled away to nothing once he became aware of just how fond she was of Hannibal.

If it wouldn’t have been such an embarrassment to admit his wife was having what amounted to an emotional affair with his orphaned nephew, Will didn’t doubt that Robert would have divorced her. As it was, the household had become a less than pleasant place for the omegas living under Robert’s roof.

Hostility wasn’t a difficult thing to endure, not for Will. Even Mischa turned her nose up at her uncle’s more misguided attempts to shame her, and Chiyoh’s walls were high. If it were only that, he could have handled it.

But watching the relationship between Hannibal and Murasaki build for three years just might have been the most painful thing Hannibal had ever done to him. *And it’s not even on purpose.* Just how far gone is he, that he could accept any torture thrown at him so long as it was intentional, because that meant Hannibal was still focused on him? Was he always like this, or is this just who he became, in the space between killing the Dragon and waking up in the past?

Not that wondering about any of it matters, not right now, and ain't *that* a bitch. Will is dying, watching them skate around one another - the lingering looks, brief touches, stolen moments in darkened doorways that never go past words. He resentfully watches everything, knowing that he won't present until he's sixteen, that there's nothing he can do because at most Hannibal sees him as an interesting, sexless possession, no matter what lies he's told to the contrary.

*He's my contracted spouse.* The words still burn. Hannibal had later explained that Robert would have gotten rid of him had there not been a viable reason for Will to remain, that it was the easiest route... but nothing about Hannibal is simple.

Initially, he’d felt some small measure of hope at the idea that maybe he’d managed to win Hannibal’s affections again, without blood, without any sacrifices that he hadn't been willing to make. He wasn’t the man he pined for, but Will already knew he’d take Hannibal in any form that he could have him. It seemed like a promising start up until the point where Hannibal was suddenly enamored with Lady Murasaki and didn’t have the time for Will that he’d had before. They went from daily talks, exploring the city with Mischa and learning about eachother to sometimes going days without even seeing one another aside from meals.

Will just can't figure out how it all could have changed so *quickly*. He knows Hannibal considers him important in some way, that his physical age is probably the only barrier that's

kept the man from considering Will as a possible partner, but knowing something doesn't relieve the sting of rejection that he feels. Not even a little bit.

Frustrated with himself, indeed with his own frustration, Will stomps down the hallway, seeking out the only two people in this convoluted mess that he can tolerate: Mischa and Chiyoh. The latter is a newer addition to their unconventional household, supposedly obtained by Robert to serve as a handmaid to Lady Murasaki but Will is betting that she's really being used as a spy.

She's a very different creature from the woman he met before, roughly thirteen and unable to hide her emotions. *Not that she tries.* Chiyoh is impossibly blunt, incapable of the cryptic words she'd once spoken to him before shoving him off a train. It makes him wonder just what happened to twist her into that silent guardian... and to hope that her fate would be different, this time around.

Soft noise from Mischa's room gives away their location and he knocks once before entering. Mischa is on the bed, chattering excitedly about something she's reading while Chiyoh sits behind her, braiding her hair. The sight brings him some measure of calm, though he suspects part of that is basic biology: omegas are always more comfortable around their own kind. **"Good morning, ladies."**

**"Will!"** Carelessly Mischa jumps of the bed, unmindful of braid now coming undone down her back and blatantly ignoring Chiyoh's annoyed huff. She wraps her arms around Will's waist happily. **"Good morning!"**

Chiyoh's greeting is less enthusiastic. **"Good morning, Will. You look awful."**

*I stayed up half the night listening to Hannibal try to convince your mistress to leave with him after they murdered her husband, of course I do.* But he doesn't have to say that because Chiyoh already knows - she'd stayed up with him, for different reasons.

**"Chiyoh that isn't very nice. You should say sorry, but I know you're not."** Mischa releases him and returns to the bed, patting the spot next to her so Will can join them. It's how they often spend their mornings and he finds comfort in it, a balm for his bruised heart.

**"You're always defending my honor, little one."** Will offers her a smile that he hopes isn't tinged with sadness. Because it's true, unfortunately. Mischa is Will's most ardent defender, against both her resentful uncle and her faithless brother. *Sometimes I wish she wouldn't. It's hard to be so loved by her and endure this. I know I just have to be patient... but it's so hard.*

**"You are my brother, of course I defend you! I defend Chiyoh too, and Hannibal."** Her aunt and uncle are noticeably absent from Mischa's protection. He wonders if it's because they are adults and can defend themselves, or if it's because Mischa sees how Hannibal and Lady Murasaki are with one another and is unhappy about it.

Instead of dwelling, Will boops her nose. **"You're a perfect knight, Lady Mischa."**

**"That may be, but even knights must mind their manners. You mustn't correct your**

**uncle so much."** Chiyoh's right, even if Will is secretly amused by Mischa's careful but pointed corrections. She always does so in a way that is so sweet and charming that to fault her would come off as churlish. He still isn't sure if that's intentional or not, but knowing her brother, he's certain she knows what she's doing.

**"He's boring."** She's so flippant, dismissive of the man who was her guardian for some time until Hannibal was legally old enough to do so. Will admires that about her - he could never be that bold. Not when it meant risking separation from Hannibal.

It's something Chiyoh understands better, her position about as stable as his own. One wrong move and she'd be out on the streets no matter what Lady Murasaki said. **"He's still the head alpha of this household."**

**"Nuh uh! *Hannibal* is my head alpha."** Mischa is adamant on that account, and he can't blame her. Robert Lecter has a strong distaste for omegas and some very traditional opinions on them. One needn't know him very long before something pompous pops out of his mouth about their clinginess or emotional instability.

It's why all three of them are banded together in one part of the house, on the opposite end from Hannibal so that they don't "disturb" the alphas with their very natures. (If Robert could get away with it Will thinks he'd have sold all three of them off by now, despite the fact that none of them had presented and it was illegal in the first place.)

Chiyoh finished with Mischa's braid, tying it off smartly with a petal pink ribbon. Her own hair was kept back by a simple headband, still growing out after Robert had ordered most of it cut off upon her arrival. Will didn't think she'd forgiven him for that yet. *I hope she never does. It was petty and cruel, a shallow display of the power he holds over us just because we're children.* **"Not while he lives under this roof."**

**"I hate to tell you this, Mischa, but Chiyoh is right about that. Robert is in charge of us all."** Not that he has any desire to be, which in itself is unusual. Most alphas love having a house full of omegas they can barter with, but not Robert, and Will didn't care enough to figure out why, though he didn't think it was anything personal. The man found most people beneath him no matter what their designation was, but omegas he'd deemed to be particularly unworthy of his notice.

**"Well that's silly. I don't know why Hannibal doesn't take us somewhere else. We have money and he doesn't even like Uncle very much."** Will and Chiyoh exchange a look, which Mischa catches. **"I am not a silly girl, so you both stop that! Hannibal is just confused. If we moved away maybe everything could be better. Aunt could have a baby, Uncle would have his heir, and Chiyoh you could come stay with us since Uncle doesn't want omegas underfoot."**

Mischa goes from the bed to the dresser, rummaging through it to pick out a dress for the day. On the bed Will and Chiyoh exchange another look, this one darker. He knows Chiyoh would like nothing more then for Hannibal to leave, because it would be the quickest way to (hopefully) put a stop to Robert's mistreatment of his wife. Personally, Will doubts that, but he won't voice the thought out loud because he knows Chiyoh needs to think that there's

something that can be done to improve Lady Murasaki's life that isn't running away with another alpha and dishonoring herself so shamefully.

How the woman ended up mated to Robert in the first place is a strange mystery. The man is fairly vocal about his dislike of omegas, and women. He's always lecturing somebody about how uncontrolled and inconvenient he finds them to be. Yet he'd gone to Japan on behalf of his country to work out a trade agreement of some kind and had come back with a wife he clearly found beneath him.

A wife that Will wanted to hate, for her connection to Hannibal... but he couldn't, because she wasn't a bad person. How could he blame her for being helpless against a Hannibal so determined to win her when he himself hadn't been able to win that fight?

And she *was* kind, even to him, a veritable street urchin with a terrible accent who was grouchy and unpleasant. One could even argue that she was *especially* good to him, often berating Hannibal for disregarding Will's feelings, for being careless with his intended. *"How can you speak this way? I am your uncle's wife, Hannibal, and your future mate sleeps under this very roof. How can you think to hurt him?"*

Hannibal's response had hurt. *"He's a child, and he is not my intended. You are."*

That's when Will had abruptly stood and gone back to his room, wiping his eyes. Chiyoh had followed not long after and they'd both fallen asleep holding one another, afraid for the future and what pain it might bring them.

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Every day, it's the same. Will can't help but see Hannibal watching Lady Murasaki, the confidence there, thinking that he'll convince her to be like him. It's a tragedy in the making - Hannibal wanting a partner so badly, unable to see that he has one in Will because of the difference in their ages. And while he watches Hannibal, the woman in question watches Will.

He can see it in her eyes, the fear of the unknown. It's as though she can feel the weight of his age lurking in his eyes and it troubles her greatly. She's an observant woman, Lady Murasaki, and in another life he knows he'd have cared for her a great deal. But in this moment, in *this* life, all he can think is how much he wishes she'd go away. Or make a stand. Do *something*. Anything but this cold, cruel standoff.

Still, Will knows he just needs to be patient. Once he goes in to heat, once he's managed to elevate himself in Hannibal's mind from interesting person to possible mate, things are going to change. He'll force them to change and use every trick in the damn book if he has to. Hannibal is *his*. That thought has been what's propelled him through this, kept him going when he wanted nothing more than to fill his pockets with stones in sink in to the river.

But then something unexpected happens. About a week after his thirteenth birthday - an event uncelebrated, as Will refuses to speak of it - he feels it: the first signs of his heat, stirring in his belly. *Shit. It's early.*

Will knows that some alphas consider a presented omega a viable mate. Even the current laws don't set a minimum age of consent for an omega that has begun having fertile heats. This first one is going to be dry, his body kick-starting to life, in a way. *But after that...*

He remembers before, wanting to claw out of his own skin. How much it hurt. At the time there'd been no alpha of interest in his life so he hadn't tried to escape their little trailer in the swamp, but things are different now and he knows he won't be able to hide away - he'd seek out Hannibal, sooner rather than later. And in his delirium he'd be too honest by half. *I can't let him know, can't give him that power over me. It's too soon, too risky.*

Chiyoh and Mischa are gone for the day, off at the zoo with Hannibal. Will had begged off easily enough to give himself time to think.

He might resent Lady Murasaki, but he admires her too. They'd be friends if it wasn't for Hannibal. He wishes he could trust her with the knowledge, but she wouldn't understand why it was important that he be kept from Hannibal... which meant Chiyoh couldn't be counted on either. She'd do as she was told. Mischa was just a child, she wouldn't be able to restrain him.

That left him with only one option: he was going to have to tell Robert.

The man disliked him enough (and sought reasons to get rid of him daily) that it was likely that he'd help keep Will locked up for the duration of his heat, out of spite if nothing else. It didn't mean Will liked the idea, but he had no other options. Telling Hannibal was definitely *not* happening, not when they hadn't built up that same connection they'd had before and he was still smarting from what sure as hell *felt* like infidelity, even if he knew how unfair that was.

Determined to see it through now that he'd decided, Will approached Robert's office and knocked, waiting for permission to enter.

**"Come in."**

It's clear that Robert isn't expecting Will, but he covers his surprise well. **"Did you need something?"** Unlike Hannibal, who prized manners above all else, Robert preferred to get straight to the point without empty pleasantries. It was probably the only thing Will liked about the man.

He also never called Will by his name, or referred to him unless absolutely necessary, but Will was used to that sort of inconsiderate behavior. He'd found the best way to deal with Robert was to be as blunt as possible, without becoming aggressive. **"Apologies, Mr. Lecter, but I'm afraid that I'm going into heat soon."**

Robert snorted at his desk, scoffing at the idea. Thirteen was a little young, true, but not impossible. Plenty of omegas presented then, especially when their potential mate was kept in the same household. **"You're probably just coming down with something, there's no need to be dramatic, child."**

**"Maybe, but this doesn't feel like sickness. It feels like... well. You know."** Will squirmed. As much as Robert appreciated straightforwardness, there was no way Will was going to say *'I feel like I need to get fucked by your nephew on every available surface'* to his face, no matter how priceless his reaction would be.

The older alpha hummed in consideration, but continued looking over his paperwork. After several minutes he looked up, annoyed to find Will still present. **"Is there something else?"**

**"No, sir."** Will's words are hesitant, laced with the disquiet he feels. He didn't expect that Robert would have a solid plan in place but it feels jarring to be dismissed so easily, without even mentioning that he'd make some kind of arrangements for Will's upcoming heat. But the man offers nothing but silent irritation, before gesturing towards the door.

**"You may go, then."**

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Though Robert clearly thinks Will is wrong, he has Will moved to another room on the next floor, away from the rest of the household. The move makes him uneasy for reasons he can't explain but blames on his shifting hormones. *It's just because I'm farther from Hannibal. That's it. It's not like Robert's going to touch me, the idea of it makes him sick. He doesn't even touch Lady Murasaki during her heats outside of what he must.*

*Still.*

In a moment of weakness he creeps downstairs in the middle of the night, going to Mischa's room and climbing in to bed with her, shaking violently even as he took comfort from her scent. **"Mischa?"**

She's mostly asleep, but turns over and smiles at him. **"Will? Are we having a sleepover?"** There have been times in the past where the three of them - Chiyoh, Mischa, and Will - would sneak in to Mischa's room and they'd curl up and sleep in a puppy pile after staying up laughing and eating sweets stolen from the kitchen. It's natural she'd think that was why he was there.

**"No, Mischa. It's..."** *I'm afraid and I don't know why.* **"Can I tell you a secret?"**

Bright eyes come in to view as she scoots closer, more awake now that he's mentioned secrets - she has a certain fondness for mystery, always has. **"What kind of secret?"**

**"The kind you can't tell anybody, not Chiyoh, not even Hannibal."** This gives the younger girl pause, because she tends to tell Hannibal all of her secrets. But after a moment she nods her head in agreement.

**"Tell me!"** Her voice is a stage-whisper at this point, but he doesn't think they'll be heard. The walls are very thick.

**"I think I'm going in to heat. I told your uncle, but he didn't believe me."** Will hates that

he's tearing up now, body torn so many different directions. Even before he fell back into time it had been *decades* since he'd had a heat. Going through that alone, when his mind still thought he was mated, was going to be *agony*.

Mischa seemed to understand that, without words. Instead of offering false comfort, she shifted so she was tucked under his chin, hugging him close when he starts to sob in earnest.

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Two days later, Will goes in to pre-heat. He's half awake and it's the dead of night when men come in to his room on silent feet and grab him. Will struggles, snarling and snapping at them before they cover his mouth, and is outraged to see Robert standing in the hallway, holding a flickering candle. **"Quickly, get him out of this house. He is unworthy of his place here and I will not have him ruining this family's reputation."**

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Mischa can hear a strange noise outside of her room. She knows she should be asleep, but Hannibal just got her a stack of new books and she'd stayed up reading them by candlelight. There's another bump, unfamiliar footsteps in the hall. It sounds like somebody is coming downstairs from Will's new room and that has her going to the door and kneeling down so she can watch from underneath the door. She can hear the men talking, something about 'discarding the boy' and she freezes... because she knows that smell. *That's Will.*

Alarmed, she almost opens her door when she hears her uncle's voice, confirming that whatever is happening is under his orders. **"Remember, drop him off in a place where he'll be found quickly. Preferably somewhere unsavory. It's where gutter trash belongs, after all."** Mischa waits, terrified, until the house grows still and she hears her uncle retreat, and then she bolts from her room. She doesn't know what to do, but Hannibal will know. He always knows just what to do. But when she opens the door... Hannibal isn't there.

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He'd gone hunting, again. Quick, unsatisfying kills in back alleys to take the edge off his anger. To keep his beast contained. Anything to keep him from pressing the object of his devotions too hard, too soon. He's sure given time Lady Murasaki will see that removing his dear uncle is the only choice they have. *And then we can be together, rule over this dismal world like the titans of creation we are.*

Smiling at the image, he doesn't notice Mischa at first. But the distinct scent of distress hits him, and he can hear her crying, and at once crosses the room to hold her. *"Mischa, my darling, what is it? Did you have a bad dream?"* He's running his hands soothingly through her hair, worrying over her state, when she chokes out what has hurt her and then everything grows cold.

*"They took Will. Uncle, he had men come and they- they-"* She's heaving out great sobs, hiccuping every now and then, and Hannibal bundles her up close, but dread is coiling up within him. Dread and a whole sea of fury.

He tries to remain calm while he questions her, not wanting to add to her upset. *"Tell me Mischa, what happened?"*

*"He told me it was a secret. I think that's why those bad men took him away."* She pauses, for long enough that Hannibal is thinking about how best to coax the story from her when she speaks again, her words muffled and hardly spoken at all. *"Because he was going into heat."*

Hannibal finds himself enraged. It's true, he'd known that his uncle disliked Will's presence and felt that Hannibal could find a much more suitable match - someone with prestige, with honor and a dowry or in the very least connections that they could use. But given that Hannibal hadn't seriously considered bonding with Will he wasn't concerned with Robert's supposed worries and ignored them. He'd never thought the man would go so far as to hurt Will in this way. *He's hardly thirteen. He's still a child and whatever Uncle has done...*

Grimly, Hannibal removes Mischa from his lap. *"Go to Chiyoh's room, sweetheart. Stay there no matter what you hear, okay?"*

She looks like she might argue, for a moment, before nodding her head and leaving the room. Trusting that Hannibal is going to fix it.

As he makes his way to his uncle's suite he sees Lady Murasaki's door crack open, revealing a sliver of her face. It's clear she is afraid but she makes no move to stop him. After he passes he can hear the door shut - whatever happens next, she will not stop him. *Wise of her.* Hannibal had never cared for anyone touching his things, after all, and what Robert has just done is a grave offense.

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The information he needs is obtained fairly quickly, which is almost a disappointment. Hannibal had hoped the man might prove to be a challenge. *He's weak. He's always been weak. I only wish I had the time to punish him properly.* But he knows Will does not have that luxury, not now, dumped in the worst part of Paris in the first stages of heat. *I'm coming Will, I promise, I'm coming.*

---

They drop him in the street, on cracked asphalt that has seen better years. Though they make a few crude remarks - one even kicks him in the ribs - the men keep their word and leave him bound like an offering right there in the road. *Anybody can find me like this.* Terror spurs him into action and, though it's painful, Will manages to dislocate his shoulder and undo the ropes binding him before quickly scurrying to an alley. He can feel the need inside of him. Everything is hot and hurting and it's only getting worse. Soon, he wasn’t going to have any control. *Hide. I need to hide.*

---

Hannibal takes Mischa with him. He cannot leave her behind and he won't risk her in the

house, not if there's a chance she might get brave and end up finding what he'd done to their uncle. Murasaki hadn't left her room when he'd gone to fetch his sister, but now that he had crossed that unspoken line... he wasn't sure how she would react.

Chiyoh hadn't been happy with him, but hadn't fought to keep Mischa with her either, instead slipping out so that she could no doubt go and comfort her mistress.

Though his sister's safety was the primary reason for taking her, he also knew she had a very keen nose, better than his own. He might need her help in the coming hour if they're going to find Will in time.

She falls asleep as he drives up and down the pitted streets with the windows rolled down, desperate for a sign of Will. *I can't be too late.* Panic is driving him, compelling him to drive the five block radius where he was told Will would be repeatedly, and his mind is unhelpfully providing too many scenarios in which this ends badly.

It's only after a half an hour of searching that he relents and wakes Mischa, who is curled up like a kitten in the front seat. *"Darling, I need your help. I can't smell him anywhere. Can you try?"*

They exit the car and, like a little bloodhound, Mischa tracks down traces of Will until she leads him to a dim alleyway. There's no sign of him, but she's sleepy and insistent. *"He's here Hannibal!"* Looking around, she walks along further. *"Will!"* He wishes she wouldn't shout, it's 3am and dangerous, but there's a rustling in the nearby dumpster and he zeroes in on it immediately.

When Hannibal opens it he is confronted with the cloying, heavy smell of half-rotted garbage... and *Will*.

*"Will?"* Though he can't see him, after a moment several bags begin to rustle and shift, revealing the omega in question, shivering and frightened but alive and unharmed. Hannibal could weep. *My clever Will.*

Leaning in, Hannibal offers his hand out, instincts still compelling him to bring Will close so that he can protect him. **"Come here, it's alright Will. Please, take my hand."** Will shakes his head, stubborn to the last. **"Will, come here."** Tentatively he stands on wobbly legs, reaching out before stopping at the last minute.

**"No, I'm filthy. I'm covered in-"**

Hannibal wastes no time plucking him from the trash the second he's within reach. **"Nevermind that Will."** And then he's holding him tightly, flooded with relief because he'd come so close to losing him on this night. It isn't until Will stops shaking that he kisses the top of his head. **"You did very well, hiding like that."**

**"I knew they'd smell me. Had to, had to *hide*."**

**"I'm very proud of you."** Mischa darts forward, yawning as she hugs both of their legs.

*Together again, in the face of an averted tragedy.* The moment is broken by the vibrating of Hannibal's phone. He pulls away slightly, removing it from his pocket and frowning at the screen. It's Murasaki.

**"Did you find him?"** Her voice is very carefully neutral, not giving away her state of mind. Yet it's the confirmation that Hannibal needs to know that she feels guilty about what has happened. Guiltier then she should, if she was just a bystander like Mischa or Chiyoh.

His voice is very cold when he responds. **"Did you know Uncle's plan?"**

Silence.

He knew she'd wanted him, despite herself. That had been obvious and was why he'd held such high hopes for her to kill his uncle in order to stand at his side. Yet it seemed to be a night of surprises and revelations for him, because Hannibal never would have believed that she would risk Will in order to keep Hannibal unbonded, available even if she herself never planned on acting on her feelings. Against him, Will shudders, a poignant reminder of the price Hannibal nearly had to pay.

Finally, she speaks again. **"You need to bring him home, Hannibal. He needs the comfort of his own bed."**

**"And Uncle?"**

**"Chiyoh and I have taken care of it."** Hannibal wants to believe her. He loves her, as much as he thinks he is capable of the emotion. But she's already betrayed him very deeply tonight. **"We both know you were within your right to challenge him."** It was archaic, and times were changing, but the old laws still held: by taking Will, Robert effectively offered Hannibal a legal reason for killing him.

*Still*. She could easily tell them of Hannibal's intentions before this moment, and the police could arrest him. And her silence nearly cost Will everything.

**"I swear to you, I will not betray you."** *You already have, dear woman. And I nearly lost something that is very precious to me.*

He's torn between wanting to take the olive branch she's offered and wanting to run with Will and Mischa while they can on the off chance that she has already reported Robert's death. Will's whimpering decides for him, knowing he's in pain and probably coming apart at the seams. Omegas need the comfort of their home, of their nest, in order to keep them from becoming distressed during their heats. Especially the first one. They also require a great deal of care and Hannibal doesn't believe he can provide for Will while also looking after Mischa.

Sighing, he hangs up and pockets the phone before scooping Will up in his arms. **"Come Mischa, we're going home."**

Chapter End Notes

PLEASE NOBODY MURDER ME OVER MURASAKI/HANNIBAL. I COULDN'T FIND A WAY AROUND IT THAT MADE SENSE IN THIS CONTEXT.

# For His Lack

Chapter Notes

> Small preface on this: omegas are intersex, they all have the same bits and pieces and are considered the same gender. Male and Female is strictly a scent thing in alphas and omegas. I'm saying this because there's a part where Will is in the shower and Mischa is helping him and I don't want anybody to freak out or get skeeved by that because nothing sexual is happening in any way, shape, or form in that part. And, just for the record, alphas also are intersex but in a different way. Betas are one or the other and are the only part of the dynamic where 'male' and 'female' are defining body parts as well.

Carefully, with a calm she does not feel, Murasaki moves through the too quiet house. Chiyoh is somewhere downstairs, preparing the necessary things Will requires for his heat, and and she wants nothing more than to join her young omega charge, if only to avoid the burden of the task that she has given herself. *Weak thoughts, for a weak woman.* In the closet on the third story she finds what she seeks: several carefully packed boxes filled with a variety of blankets and pillows.

Soft things, perfect for nesting, all meticulously picked out or made by her own hands for the time that Will matured and would need them.

No small part of her hates what they now represent.

It had started so small. When he'd first arrived he had been so thin and pale, a child so desperately in want of nurturing. Robert had bid her to care for him and Mischa and, dutifully, she had. She'd *wanted* to. Not for Hannibal, no that came later. At the time she had wanted so badly to please her aloof husband, to earn the praise he so rarely offered her.

And then one day, she had been sitting with Hannibal in the dining room, enjoying breakfast, when she'd looked up and he'd been watching her in that peculiar way of his. Solemn, but piercing. Like he could see down to her very soul. Like he knew her, intimately. It had made her blush to be looked at so boldly and in that moment she'd wanted it, wanted Hannibal's eyes on her. Wanted in a way she didn't even understand.

Later she had been deeply ashamed. The boy - and he was a boy, eight years her junior! - was her husband's *nephew*. He had been orphaned and had suffered a great deal. She should not think of him that way. Especially not with the ever-watchful Will present. He'd entered on silent feet, observed them together, and had quickly turned and left without a word, jaw clenched and fists tight.

Murasaki felt guilty, incredibly so. To lessen the feeling she'd thought to get him a present,

some sort of reassurance that his place here was safe. That she'd never act on whatever momentary thoughts she had had about Hannibal. So she'd made him a blanket, embroidered with birds and flowers, a gift that could go towards his nesting box. But she'd never given it to him, because she knew herself. *Knew* the traitor hiding beneath her breast.

She wanted Hannibal.

So it went that she slowly acquired things for Will, each item selected or created in the wake of guilt. It was all she could think to do for him, when her every thought betrayed him so badly. As time went on she thought that perhaps it was better for him, that Hannibal did not want him in that way, because Hannibal was many things but his capabilities were... *he... think it. You cannot say it out loud but you know what he is. Even now your husband's body grows cold, his blood soaking your marriage bed. Hannibal is dangerous. He's a killer.*

She could tell herself: Will deserved light in his life, joy. Hannibal could not offer that to him, nor could he offer his fidelity if his own words regarding her were true. Better that Will find someone else who could love and appreciate him. If only that was what the stubborn child wanted. But Murasaki also knew this wasn't the core of it, the sterling truth.

Yet wasn't Will equally strange, in his own way? She had not noticed it at first, or had attributed it to the trauma he must have endured when they made their escape, but he was not an ordinary boy. At times she wasn't even sure he was human. She'd read once about changelings, strange, fae-blooded creatures exchanged for human babies, left to wither and die in their place.

Perhaps it was unfair, but she grew to resent him. Because he had a claim on Hannibal, one that was honorable. And Hannibal clearly favored him, treating him almost like an equal. Their relationship had suffered when Hannibal's attentions had wandered to her, but he still did not think to give up Will. Not once. Nor did he seem to require a sacrifice from Will, and wasn't that a bitter hurt? Constantly, he asked her to make a choice. To take a life to prove her desire for him. He never asked that of Will.

She had questioned him once, angry and hurt by him once again insisting that she had to destroy Robert herself, to show her loyalty. *If it's so important that I kill for you, why do you not expect Will to do the same? You admire him, I know you do. He would not be here otherwise.*

Infuriatingly, he'd only smiled, bowed, and left her to her thoughts.

*If only I had met Hannibal first, before Robert. I would not feel this way towards a child, would not stoop so low as to consider him competition. Will had done nothing wrong and I have been worse then cruel to him on this night, all for want of Hannibal.* It was a fantasy, but Murasaki could not help but think that she would have been able to care for Will then, to mother him. They could have raised Will, and Chiyoh, and little Mischa alongside their own children. They could have been a family.

Too late. It's much too late. Hannibal was coming, returning with his heatsick bride, and she didn't know what he would do once he arrived. The thought should have been a terrifying

one. She should have been fleeing in to the night with Chiyoh as fast and far as she could run, but Murasaki was not a coward. She had faced years of Robert's increasing hostility and neglect, his words like sharp little knives under her skin, and she would face the choice she had made regarding Will Graham with all the dignity she could muster.

And when it was over, she would accept his wrath.

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Initially, Hannibal had tried to lie Will down in the backseat of his car, but he began to whine - disoriented and afraid, unseeing - and clung to Hannibal's shirtfront until he relented and carried Will with him to the driver's seat. He was small enough that he could curl up in Hannibal's lap and not be too much of a hindrance, but it was a reminder that Will had grown since he had arrived so suddenly in to the Lecter sibling's lives. His shoulders were beginning to broaden, and he'd shot up nearly a foot.

*Strange to think of him growing so much. Sometimes it's hard not to look at him and think of the child who fought so viciously to save my life, to save Mischa. But he is not quite a child any longer, is he? He's something inbetween.*

Wet lashes curled against his cheeks, fluttering every now and then. In the passenger seat Mischa yawned but managed to stay awake, her worry chasing away any thoughts of sleep. *"Hannibal?"*

*"Yes, Mischa?"*

They were nearly home, a few blocks away, and she'd spent the last ten minutes squirming in her seat. Clearly worried and unable to hide it. Finally she speaks, her voice gentle in the hushed quiet of the car. *"What happened to Uncle?"*

Hannibal cannot look at her. Will has stilled against him, as though he's aware enough to be terrified of the answer, but the words don't come. He knows he should lie to her, protect her from what he has done, but he has never liked the idea of misleading Mischa. She needed to be kept safe, to be sheltered... but it was a disservice to her, hiding the truth.

He settled for the middleground, parking in the driveway and turning to face her, half-smiling at how serious she looked. *"I had to hurt him, sweet girl. He would not tell me where Will was and I was worried for him."* He paused, Will burrowing against his neck with a whimper. *"He is dead."*

The words sink in to the air surrounding them, Mischa shivering slightly at the implications: she loves her brother dearly, but she knows what he's done is wrong. That it went beyond finding Will. But what would she do? Would she understand?

Finally, she nods her little head. *"It had to be done." Beautiful, brilliant girl.* Hannibal finds his eyes growing wet with pride. *"You had to protect Will."*

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Gently Hannibal gathers Will up in his arms and they enter the house. Murasaki comes bustling out of the kitchen, her face grave as she takes them all in. It's clear she wants to say something but the moment passes as his aunt comes downstairs, elegant as always. **"You're back."** Though her face is a mask, revealing nothing, Hannibal can smell her fear, the sharp tang of it brittle with hints of citrus. It's the first time she has felt the need to state something so obvious, but he cannot fault her nerves. He's very angry with her.

Instead of speaking, Hannibal nods, shifting his precious burden and making his way to the second floor - passing the older omega without pause. Behind him he can hear her take a shuddering breath before she's talking to Mischa, asking if she's hungry but strangely his sister does not speak either, following him up.

She's so clear about her loyalty that it almost hurts.

He starts to bring Will to his old room but Mischa stops him, shaking her head. **"Uncle had him moved upstairs."**

**"Why?"**

**"Because we only have our big nest. The room's upstairs are for grown up omegas."** She pauses, brow furrowed. **"That's what he said."**

While Hannibal doubts very much that it had been the man's sole motivation, it makes sense. Many houses were set-up in a similar manner, with the top floor specially catering to the needs of omegas. The rooms would all have a private bathroom, as well as a special nesting room attached. Nesting rooms were still a subject of some controversy among many. That they were needed was undisputed, but rarely did any scholars agree as to why. Privately Hannibal believed it hearkened back to a time when an omega's best defense was to hide themselves somewhere small and dark, difficult to reach.

Still, it would be best to take Will there, even if the room was not his own. He did not doubt Mischa when she said there was only one nesting area on the second floor - again, it was simply how most houses were constructed. Second levels were split between rooms for alphas and a sort of nursery suite, along with guest rooms. The bottom floor would consist of practical rooms, like kitchens and living areas, and the third story was for omegas as it was considered the best defended and safest location.

In his arms Will is growing feverish, muttering to himself though it's hard to make out the words. Hannibal carries him to the room Mischa indicates before setting him down in the attached bathroom. After his stint in the dumpster, he needs to be washed, and the water should cool him down. **"Mischa, will you help him bathe? I need to help prepare the room."**

Mischa nods, deft little fingers quickly stripping Will out of his nightshirt even as Hannibal leaves the room and shuts the door behind him.

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He's shaking, the pain a distant storm that's slowly rolling in the horizon, drawing closer with every breath. *Fuck, was it always this bad?* Will can't even hold his hands steady as he tries to help Mischa, but thankfully she manages well enough, stripping off his top and pajama bottoms before turning on the water and ushering him inside the glass. Finally she speaks, her voice impossibly gentle. **"Are you okay Will? Can you stand?"**

It takes some effort to step in to the shower but he's able to lean against the tiles which helps keep him upright, though it feels like a near thing. Taking stock of himself Will can feel how badly his stomach is cramping, the weakness in his legs and the way his back keeps tensing and spasming. Heats are brutal, but the first one is very well-known for being the worst and that has him clenching his teeth. *I'm just going to have to deal with it.* **"I... I think so. Thank you, Mischa."**

His gratefulness is sincere. The first time he went through this there'd been no one, even his father had skipped out. Having another omega there to help is... it's *nice*. Soothing. Especially when it's sharp-tongued little Mischa, the sister he never expected to have. They've been taught enough by Lady Murasaki about their bodies and what to expect in the future, so Mischa is careful about the assistance she offers, climbing in the shower and scrubbing at his back with a washcloth and a blandly scented soap. *Because alphas don't like foreign scents.*

Will knows that, ordinarily, he wouldn't have an alpha to support him through this at all, that it was omega family members who got them through their first heat. *But nothing about this is ordinary, and if Hannibal doesn't help me I am going to kill him.* Mischa's voice breaks in to his less-then-charitable thoughts. **"Is the water too hot?"**

**"No, it's fine."** He shakes his head, trying to focus on the warmth of the water, the comfort of having his family with him. It's still strange to think of having one, jarring in a way that would probably be depressing if anyone else knew. Alana certainly pitied him for his lack. But at the time, Will hadn't known any different. He had his dad, an abandoned omega who couldn't cope, and once he was eighteen he had himself. He hadn't known anything else - even having the dogs felt like a luxury.

Only he did have that now, in Mischa and Chiyoh and Hannibal. Even Murasaki and Robert, to a lesser extent. *Well, I did have Robert. Pretty sure he's in bite-sized pieces now. I wonder if Hannibal is going to cook him for me? Handfeed him to me?* The thought is a sharp one, a wound he'd forgotten about. Because of course, Hannibal didn't cook his kills. Not in this life.

**"I knew he'd find you."** Mischa has grabbed the small stool in the corner and pushed him down on it so she can scrub at his hair, determined to remove any hint of the men who took him as well as the lingering traces of garbage that are probably clinging to him. **"Hannibal is going to make it better Will."** *She's so certain. I wish I had that kind of faith.* In a smaller voice, she asks him something else. **"Are you nervous?"**

**"Yes."** *Even before, there hadn't been time. The Dragon had been coming. They'd never...*

**"You know what Aunt said. Alphas know what to do, he'll take care of you, and then you'll be mates and my brother for real. Just think of it."** *Can it really be that easy?* Will

doesn't think so. With Robert's death... there's every possibility that he's just pushed Hannibal straight in to Murasaki's arms. There's nothing to stop them from bonding now.

**"I hope so."** And god, he fucking *does*. So much. He's never wanted anything like he wants Hannibal. Can't he just have this one thing? **"I do want to be your brother, little Mischa."** He turns his head to look at her, offering a smile because it's so easy to do so.

**"And Hannibal's mate?"** She's grinning at him, impish and delighted because she thinks her two favorite people are about to become one.

**"You know I do."** *Just not always the Hannibal you think I mean.*

# NOT A CHAPTER

Just a head up that I've enabled comment moderation. I might not be responding to comments at all any longer. It was that or delete this entire story and I feel like that's not entirely fair.

So, from now on, for those of you stomping your feet because you don't like the version of Hannibal in this story or Murasaki, then I'm very sorry but this is not the story for you. There are plenty of others out there for you to enjoy and I wish you the best in finding them. The likelihood of me writing the planned versions of it where we do get both of them aware are getting smaller every day because this is turning from a fun story I enjoyed writing to an absolute nightmare.

The Hannibal *in this story* is NOT the Hannibal on the show. I don't know how I can be any clearer about that. He's not going to be him. He's basically an entire new character and so no, there won't be any extended 'Will punishes Hannibal' scenes because... this is a new person. I also don't know how I can be clearer about that.

Will *in this story* does not give a shit and is taking what he can get.

Murasaki is a human being who made a shitty decision, though I want to be clear that all she *KNEW* was that Will was being removed from the house. Omega murder in this verse isn't actually very common. I can get in to how surviving abuse makes monsters of us all, but I'm fucking tired.

This is based on a dark show with dark themes. If you cannot handle dark themes, you shouldn't be here either.

Good day.

# The Kindness Stung Worse

Chapter Notes

OKAY GUYS. As you can see, the underage warning has been invoked! If you want to know, specifically, what all is going to go down, see my notes at the bottom. Otherwise, just skip the very last section that's marked with an asterix *

Also this hasn't been beta-read because I honestly wanted to forget about this story all week, so that's on me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Though he'd told Mischa that he intended to help prepare the room, when Hannibal steps out and closes the door behind him he's met with Lady Murasaki, delicately balancing several boxes in her hands. He's automatically taking them from her, the urge to be polite ingrained in his nature, without a thought, and by then he knows that the conversation he'd avoided downstairs is coming whether he is prepared for it or not. And that too makes him angry.

*I am not ready to speak with her on this subject.*

He's aware of how tense his body is, the erratic urges firing in his brain, demanding that he do something rash. Years of practice, carefully cultivating his darker impulses and only acting upon them when prudent are no match for the tidal wave of emotion that he's feeling in this moment. It's nearly overwhelming. Perhaps because Hannibal doesn't typically feel like this about ordinary interactions with others. There have been times when a particularly moving aria has reduced him to tears, or he read something so profound that he had to stop and linger in the moment. But very few times has he felt this way, out of control and *dangerous*.

The last time was when Grutas and his men broke into his home, and the memory brings back unpleasant ghosts, which only goads him to further violence. Part of him can step back from this maelstrom, observe it with a cool logic. This part is almost fascinated by what it observes. *I want to commit violence, as though it is the only definitive way to assert myself and protect that which I consider my own. Is this a natural response, I wonder? Or is this how I learned to handle such extremes?*

**"Hannibal, please. We must speak."** *No we must not.* He does not say that, instead inclining his head slightly as though he agrees.

She's so blood warm before him, gentle and beautiful, embodying many of the finer qualities he admires. But she is also cruel, and that too he cannot help but *see* and *know*. He's always thought cruelty was appealing, even when it's been directed at him. **"I find myself curiously wanting to ask you why, even if I already know the answer."**

Hannibal wonders if she'll acknowledge the truth of what she's done, the flare of green wrapping around her every action. Does such jealousy burn, like a fire in her veins?

When she looks down he thinks that she is going to further disappoint him, but then her dark eyes dart up and he sees the darkness in them. The small creature he's been trying so hard to feed and bring to life. **"You asked something of me. You asked for a sacrifice."** Her voice is deceptively soft, he can hardly make it out.

*How dare she.* **"He was not yours to sacrifice."** She's disappointed him after all, unable or unwilling to see why he required such a specific lamb for slaughter. He wanted proof of her heart, of a devotion equal to his own. Will had already proved himself years ago, thrown himself on the altar of Hannibal's greater good by ensuring Mischa could escape that house of horrors, and he'd done it without ever being asked.

*Will*. Hannibal thought of him now, struggling upstairs, suffering so exquisitely. Before Lady Murasaki had forced his hand, Hannibal had envisioned a future with her at his side, beloved and protected from all that might harm her. Elevated, as she should be. And in that life there was a place for Will. *There always was a place for Will.*

He thought he might bring him on hunts, like an apprentice. An acolyte. It would sate something in him to share that with another, knowing that - while he might convince her to kill Robert - his chosen would never delight in the disposal of lesser men, not as he did. *But Will would.*

There are tears in her eyes now, a mixture of impotent fury and hurt. He can see the plea for mercy right there on her parted mouth, and suddenly Hannibal cannot stomach another moment with her. Not when he's grieving the life they might have had. **"Hannibal-"**

Without a response, he shoves the boxes in back in her arms, turns and heads for the kitchen, intent on helping Chiyoh prepare for Will's upcoming heat.

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Mischa helps him out of the shower and briskly towels him off, but when he goes to grab his robe she stops him, snatching it out of his hands. **"Wait!"** He's expecting some sort of explanation but the girl gives none, choosing to put the robe on herself and dart out of the room.

Will might have given chase, assuming she was playing a game, but right now his legs are basically jello and he's having enough trouble staying upright while clinging to the counter, and so he waits. Mischa is ever with a purpose, after all. He doubts she's just going to leave him.

A particularly fierce cramp has him staggering, his knuckles turning white from his deathgrip on the marble. *This isn't even the worst part. It hasn't even started yet. Fuck, I don't know if I can do this. Maybe Hannibal can just drug me until I'm out of my mind and feel nothing? No, he wouldn't do that. He'll want to watch me in distress. He likes it. He's always liked it. Here,*

*there, everywhere. I wonder if he's with her now? If she's tempting him with a soft smile and promises she can't keep?*

*I'll tear her fucking throat out if he claims her now. Even Mischa wouldn't be able to stop me.*

*Christ, I feel like an animal.*

In the other room he can hear the slap of bare feet against the hardwood, drawing closer before Mischa comes flying into the bathroom holding a questionably wrapped box of some kind. **"I got you a present!"**

Traditionally, gifts are given to presenting omegas. Will *knew* that and in hindsight he should have expected it. But he'd never had a family before, not one that cared enough to follow through on tradition and the like, and to be honest he'd gotten so used to it that Will told himself that he didn't care, that it was all meaningless bullshit anyway. Seeing Mischa now, glowing with happiness and half tripping over his too-long robe, Will knows that it's not. *That it never has been. It just hurt to much to think otherwise.*

Gently, with shaking hands he blames on the riot of pain blooming in his belly, Will takes the offered present. **"Thank you Mischa, you didn't have to."**

**"Only a bad sister would not!"** She is briefly indignant, before she seems to remember that Will is not like her. It's come up before, how different their expectations of the world are. Despite her young age Mischa seems to grasp almost intuitively that Will is *other* in more ways than one, and she accepts that without hesitation, doing her best to adjust accordingly. *I really do adore her.* **"Open it Will!"**

Borrowing her excitement, too afraid to admit to his own, Will carefully pulls off the paper and opens the cardboard flaps, revealing pale blue tissue paper and, underneath, a gorgeous silk robe printed with... dogs. His first reaction is to laugh, because he loves it.

It's a child's gift, the sort of thing an adult might be ashamed of owning otherwise, and it's filled with so much love already. Will knows that Mischa spent weeks looking for something like this, might have even asking Lady Murasaki if she could have it specially made because she knew how much Will liked dogs. It was so simple. It was perfect.

**"Don't cry Will!"** Small hands encircle his face as she leans up and kisses his cheek before stepping back to help him in to the robe. It might have been the softest thing he'd ever worn and Will was helpless against the luxury of it, smoothing his hands down the front.

**"Happy tears, Mischa. Happy tears."** His throat feels thick, tight with emotion. He honestly isn't sure if he's happy, or sad, or grieving about his old life in a new, painful way. *Dad didn't even get me clean towels the first time. He'd just gone pale, stuttered something about a job, and left me in the tub. I remember when he came back a week later, stumbling and slurring, apologizing because he knew what it meant to be an omega in the world. He just kept saying he was sorry. I remember thinking for the first time that to be an omega was something to be ashamed of.*

Mischa's bright voice breaks in to his thoughts, tugging at his hand and leading him in to the main room. **"There's more in the room, come look!"**

At first Will isn't entirely sure what he's seeing. His head is throbbing, he aches everywhere and it's so hard to think beyond wanting Hannibal with him right *now*. But then he makes sense of the boxes on the bed, already open to reveal silk and velvet, all in glimmering jewel tones. *Bedding. It's bedding, for my nest.*

His mouth falls open slightly before he starts to *see*, unable to help himself. And what he sees is guilt. He knows without even seeing her face that this is Lady Murasaki's doing. That she purchased these things, or made them, for every moment she felt weak in her heart. *And now I'm supposed to line my nest with it, this physical representation of her betrayal. And his.*

*What a bitch.*

Yet none of this shows on his face - it can't, not with Mischa in the room, excitedly chattering over everything, pulling out various blankets and pillows, rubbing them against her cheek. She wouldn't be able to understand. Not to mention... there's a certain amount of dark satisfaction, seeing the spoils of his war over Hannibal on the bed, because he *knows* she never intended for these things to be used for Will *and* Hannibal. No, she'd thought Will would find somebody else, that somehow her deepest hopes would be fulfilled without blood, without death. She should have known better.

And now she's lost. She has to have lost. Will might be half-drunk on hormones but he saw how furious Hannibal was and a phantom twinge in his abdomen reminds him all too clearly of what happens when Hannibal is angry and hurt. *He forgives as God forgives, even now, and how could he possibly hurt her more than by taking me to bed?*

Part of him hates that he's so accepting of that idea. That he's willing to take on Alana's old role. But Will is not Alana, and he knows once he has that foothold he'll never give it up. Hannibal is going to be his, and there's not a damn thing anyone can do about that - not even Hannibal himself.

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Chiyoh doesn't react when she hears him entering the kitchen, choosing to instead continue with her work. So far he can see she's prepared three trays of cold cuts and is now working on dicing up fruits - omegas are notorious for being difficult to feed during heats, and finger foods are seen as the easiest option. That said, she's chopping much more forcefully than required, and Hannibal knows he'll need to address her anger and resentment towards him at some point.

**"What can I do to assist you, Chiyoh?"**

She's unimpressed with his polite offer, which is rather commonplace for her. Wherever his uncle managed to dig her up from, Chiyoh has seen darkness and knows it well enough to know not to trust him. She also isn't as seduced by it as others are. **"We don't have enough food, or bottled water. Mr. Lecter did not inform us of Will's predicament."**

**"I take it you're asking if I'll go to the store?"**

He smiles at her, hoping to provoke a response, but Chiyoh's face remains carefully neutral as she points to a paper near the edge of the counter. **"Please. I have a list ready."**

**"I won't be very long."** Given the hour, he won't be able to buy the supplies he prefers, but the list seems fairly simple enough. If she were older Chiyoh could probably have fetched such things herself - still might have, even now. But it's clear she has no intentions of abandoning Murasaki, not even for Will's comfort.

Grabbing the keys off the hook, Hannibal prepares to leave when Chiyoh stops him, practically barking out the word. **"Wait."**

*Ah, is this it then?* Hannibal waits as he was asked, arms crossed. He can't be certain of what she'll say, but her hesitancy speaks profoundly of her state of mind. But what will win out? The need to speak her peace, or the survival instincts that have served her so well? **"What are you going to do, with Will?"**

**"I will care for him, obviously."** Hannibal isn't sure where this line of questioning is leading. He knows that Chiyoh has always disliked the relationship that he has with Lady Murasaki - and rightly so, considering her own place in the household. But she's never seemed to hold a grudge against Will.

**"To punish *her*."** Her voice is sharp, barbed at the edges as she clutches at the knife. **"That isn't fair to Will."**

Now that is surprising, her sudden defense of Will. Surprising and troubling, should she decide to interfere. **"I've never been accused of fairness, Chiyoh."**

**"You won't be happy with her, Hannibal. But Will... you don't see it. How he watches you. Like he grows full from the very sight of you. You're alike, I think in more ways than you admit to."** She pauses briefly, biting at her lip. Bravely seeing through this moment even as she clings to the knife in her hands as though she expects him to attack her at any moment for speaking. **"You could be happy."**

**"I may be angry, but I am not fickle, Chiyoh."** He doesn't understand how she could possibly think he would give up Murasaki now. He's worked so hard, and she has hurt him so much on this night, but he loves her.

The girl at the other end of the counter isn't willing to bend, it seems. Firing back a quick response that stings all the way out to the car. **"You aren't constant either. People change, they adapt. They become. If you aren't careful, Will is going to be a stranger to you."**

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The store isn't his preference, but it's just late enough now to be considered early morning and his options are limited to the glaring fluorescent lights of the local twenty four hour store.

It would be a lie to say that he fully remembers the drive over, having slipped into auto pilot some time ago so he can better consider all that has occurred - wanting to process it properly before he returns to the house. To Chiyoh and Mischa and Murasaki.

To Will in his heat bed.

Just how a slip of an omega managed to rile him so deeply is unclear. Hannibal knows he is feeling off-balance, that he has been ever since Mischa told him Will had been taken from their home, but it's the things Chiyoh has said to him dig underneath the skin, burrowing there with biting cruelty.

He dislikes feeling so uncertain about himself, about his wants. This whole, long night has been an experience he never cares to repeat... but he also knows that he will grow the stronger for it. He's been much too complacent in life until this point, untested. And now that is changing.

Hannibal pays no attention to the scarce few patrons around him, considering how he might evolve from this point. The games he's been playing within his household have been redefined by all of their actions and his next moves my very well prove vital. In his distraction, he misses the loud, noisy inhale of the man several feet away. **"Smells like you're about to have a good time."**

It takes a moment for his brain to acknowledge that he's been spoken to, and once he has, Hannibal is briefly confused. But only briefly. And then everything he is feeling coalesces and he looks at the man - an unkempt alpha in his late thirties, leering at him as though they are part of some conspiracy - with ill-concealed contempt. **"I beg your pardon?"**

**"Got a little piece at home, ready to play?"** The man seems unconcerned about the public nature of their location, or the absolute rudeness of his comments. He scratches lazily at his neck, smiling as though they are two equals. Hannibal wants to bite his hand off. **"Fresh ones are the best. Good on you."**

Though he's been having difficulty with control for what seems like hours now, it's surprisingly easy to step away and continue on with his shopping. In the back of his mind, he's already planning, knowing that the quickest way to restoring his equilibrium is to kill - and no one will miss this particular specimen. **"Excuse me."**

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Will Graham is thirty seven goddamn years old. You'd think - *think* - he would have managed in that time to learn how to build a goddamn nest. But here he is, sitting in the middle of a room that looks like a blanket factory threw up on it, about to cry because none of it is *right*. *Hannibal is supposed to be here with me, my Hannibal. It's supposed to smell like us, not like fabric softener. We should have been in here days ago, curled up together, safe and warm and waiting.*

He remembers Hannibal entering his nest before, in that other life. He'd been feeling like shit - it was during the encephalitis days - and managed to crawl into his nest and not much else.

Jack had gotten worried, Hannibal had magnanimously taken advantage of his concern, and had shown up to check up on him.

Whatever he expected to find, Will is sure it wasn't him secure in his nest. Most people didn't even think he *had* one. He was too unnatural, too alien. They assumed he didn't have the urge.

Admittedly, Will denied himself the comfort most of the time. He slept on a mattress in the living room and, on the rare occasions he needed his nest, he never used the one upstairs. Instead he'd knocked out part of the living room wall and built a small room that was more or less the size of a twin mattress and concealed the door with a dresser. You couldn't see it unless you *really* looked - or if Will left the door cracked, like he had that day, not expecting anyone to come looking for him.

One minute he was alone in the dark, whimpering because he wouldn't even allow himself to stock the nook with soft things like his nature demanded and it hurt his skin, and the next the door had opened to reveal Hannibal Lecter's face. Will would never forget that moment, the war between fondness and despair hidden just underneath the surface of his mask. Like Hannibal couldn't decide what to feel. *It was beautiful.*

Will had known he should have grouched at being found in such a vulnerable state, should have dredged up fury and outrage, but he'd been weak in that moment. He needed something that he had no name for, but he'd take Hannibal in its place. (Little did he know that it was Hannibal he'd needed all that time.)

So he didn't get angry, or upset. He'd forced himself to sit up instead and held out a hand before offering another small whimper, suddenly petrified that Hannibal was going to leave him there, alone in the dark.

*"Will."* It was only his name, just one word, but Hannibal managed to imbibe it with such depth. A wealth of meaning that comforted him even as the man himself took off his jacket and shoes and crawled inside Will's nest, shutting them up together in the inky blackness. Will remembered being gathered up in his arms and just *held*, Hannibal's long fingers running through his hair as he whispered soothing nonsense. They must have stayed that way for hours, until Will fell asleep.

When he woke, Hannibal was still there, offering him a rather meager plate of bacon and eggs, no doubt annoyed that Will didn't have much else in the way of ingredients. They'd never talked about it after, not once. But something had clicked into place that day. Instead of solely tormenting him, Hannibal had begun offering Will kindness.

Later, in the cell, knowing what he did, the kindness stung worse than the cruelty.

*And now we're here. Or I'm here. Fucking miserable and fighting it so hard but I know I can't do that forever. He's going to see right through me, like he always fucking does. What if I slip up? Say something about the past - the future? - and that... breaks things, somehow? Ruins the magic of what I have now and puts me back in that place, falling fast into the relentless sea?* He's so afraid that to speak of it outloud will somehow break the spell he’s under. It's

ridiculous, but then again, his being here, now, is absurd so what's to say that he's not right?

*I can't let that happen. I can't.*

Beside him, Mischa is running her hands down his back, a tangible reminder of what he could lose, trying to help him but not sure where to begin. Together they've been sitting just outside the small door to his new nest, Will refusing to go inside it. Chiyoh brought a few things from their nest downstairs, hoping the familiar scents will help calm him down, but none of it is Hannibal's and he just can't go in there without him. *Hannibal*. That's the only thing he needs to feel better, and it's also the one thing he's scared of. No one else alive could crack him open the way that man can.

He must lose time, because now Chiyoh is there, he can see her in the nesting room, stocking the small fridge there with carefully packed tupperware. And behind them, the door is opening. Will can smell blood, and Hannibal. He doesn't turn to see, he *can't*. He watches Chiyoh instead, the small furrow between her brows that she forcibly removes from her expression before she steps outside the nest. She's moving like prey and next to him Mischa's mouth has fallen open at whatever she sees but still, Will can't turn around.

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**"I will tend to him now, Mischa. But first, may we speak? Alone?"** It is later than he expected it to be, the sun just starting to creep over the horizon, but there had been some trouble with the crude alpha that he'd met in the store - it had taken some time to clean up, and he'd been in a hurry to get back before Will fell in to full blown heat.

He knows there's still blood on him, though he'd changed his clothing in a rest stop.

He also knows that, if she cannot see it, Mischa can certainly *smell* it.

Yet her reaction is to scrunch up her face, disapproving but not disgusted. It is hard to say just what she thinks, as she turns to Will, rubbing his back and trying to gauge whatever she sees on his face. Chiyoh remains in the doorway to Will's nest, frozen in place. She's afraid, understandably, that his violence might extend to those in this room, but he bled out the worst of his fury beating the man to death in a local park. He's calm now, though still unsettled.

**"Will, are you going to be okay for a minute?"** For his part Will hasn't moved at all, though he's wound so tightly already it's hard to imagine his body tensing up anymore. The pain must be close to intolerable, but he doesn't make even the smallest of sounds, choosing to nod his head in response.

That seems to propel Chiyoh in to action and she sinks down at Will's other side, taking over Mischa's soft petting down his back. Hannibal wonders if she sees the darkness in Will too, the monster within. He wonders if she thinks it will protect her from Hannibal, should it come down to it.

Mischa stands, reluctantly, and follows him out of the room. Their aunt is nowhere in sight, but Hannibal thinks he heard her in the living room when he came in, doing what he cannot

say. For her sake, he hopes she's not going to be any more foolish than she already has been. He'd hate to kill her. **"We don't have much time, Mischa. When Will enters his heat fully I must devote all of my time to him until it passes."**

While he knows that it is unconventional for him to tend to Will during this time, Hannibal does not consider another choice. Will's first heat belongs to him, all of the agony and suffering and pleasure included therein. He has no intentions of doing more than witnessing the event, naturally, but he is aware that it is crossing a social barrier for him to be present at such a time. He just doesn't particularly care. **"I need you to keep an eye on Chiyoh and our Aunt. If something seems strange, or suspicious, I need you to tell me."**

Again, her little nose wrinkles up, though it's confusion marking her face just now. **"But why?"**

*Because they very well might give me away to the police in order to save their own skins.* **"I worry what they might do, in the wake of Uncle's death. I cannot protect Will, and you, if I don't know what they are planning."** It is not a lie, but Hannibal feels guilty for not giving her the whole of the truth. But his skin itches with a need to go back to the room, to witness Will's heat for himself.

**"If I see something, what do I do? They'll notice if I come upstairs."** *My clever sister, always so practical.*

**"Say you had a nightmare, and only wished to speak with me through the door. But I think they won't question you too closely, so long as you are careful. Can you do that, sweet girl?"** He has all faith in Mischa, in her abilities to spy for him without giving herself away, but he worries that she might not agree to it. She is so very honest, his sister. Such subterfuge is beneath her.

**"Yes."** It's very clear that, as she looks up at him, she can see the blood speckling his face, perhaps on his hands. But she says nothing - for now. It is the best he can hope for in this situation.

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*When he returns to the room, Mischa does not join him, understanding that what happens next is to be between him and Will, without interference from the outside world. Without a word Chiyoh stands and quits the room, sidling alongside the wall in order to avoid coming into contact with him.

Will still hasn’t moved, though he’s whimpering now, wrapped up in a silk robe Hannibal hasn’t seen before.

Carefully, Hannibal approaches him, well aware of what Will is capable of. Other omegas might be pliant and meek during their heats, might beg for comfort and assurance, but Will is an unpredictable entity. He could just as easily try to tear out Hannibal’s throat for approaching him. **“Will?”**

Though Hannibal wouldn't have thought it possible, Will curls in on himself further. But he isn't afraid - not of Hannibal, at least. This is something else, something Hannibal has no word for. **"I need you to tell me now what it is that you want."** Those are not the words he expected to say, yet they feel right. If Will wishes, he'll leave him to the care of his sister and Chiyoh, even if it would pain him to do so.

He's standing before Will now, and slowly crouches down so they are face to face. His pupils are dilated, he's so very close to falling off the edge entirely, and still he fights it. *My dear Will.* **"You can nod your head, if it's hard to speak."**

Instead, Will grabs ahold of his shirt, clinging tightly.

**"Very well then. Let's get you in your nest, hmm?"** Strange that he does not have to remind himself to be gentle as he lifts Will up in his arms and carries him in to the other room. It comes naturally, if a bit awkwardly given that the door to the nesting room ends at his waist and he has to remain crouched down in order to get through it, but once he's inside he stands up fully.

The room is satisfactory, if sterile. It's very clear it was only recently aired out for use - probably after Murasaki called him. The walls are painted a warm, deep yellow and there's a sunken mattress a few steps away. Overall it's the size of a walk-in closet, with a small dresser he assumes is filled with towels and a small fridge.

Will is a warm weight against his chest, his face buried against Hannibal's neck. He refuses to release Hannibal when he tries to set him down, but with some prying he's able to free himself from Will's grasp, setting him down on the bare mattress. **"Just a moment, Will. I'm going to retrieve your nesting supplies. You want to make it comfortable for us, don't you?"**

**"Yes."** His voice sounds raspy, reminding Hannibal that he should try and get him to drink some water before they proceed.

It takes three trips to gather everything up from the floor and it seems that is enough time for Will's heat to finally break. As Hannibal brings the last armful of bedding in to the room he watches fondly as Will constructs his nest.

Whatever hesitation he'd had before seemed to have vanished with Hannibal's presence, and that knowledge gives him no end of satisfaction. No doubt his own nature pleased with the idea of Will refusing to feel safe enough to nest without Hannibal there to watch over him. He tries not to let it affect him, overmuch, offering the rest of the linens over to Will before firmly shutting the door.

From now on, it can only be opened from their side.

Will seems satisfied with what he's done, finally stretching out on the bed, whining softly. Now that his heat is here in full he's going to be experiencing more of the pain, but with it will come the first tendrils of pleasure. It's unlikely that he'll produce slick - first heats are almost exclusively dry - but that won't stop him from becoming aroused.

Which he appears to be, pale hands sliding under his robe, inching slowly down his torso. Hannibal sits just outside of reach, leaning back against the wall to watch as Will's hands find the beginnings of his erection. It's an appealing sight, in many ways. He's always regarded Will as a beauty, the sort of face Botticelli would take great pains to recreate. But he'd never crossed that line from admiration in to lust.

Lust was never an easy creature, for Hannibal. He found so little to genuinely like about others and felt so above them that the idea of having sex with the majority of those he encountered felt vaguely disgusting. Murasaki was an exception, though he'd experimented with others, naturally, in order to explore his own appetites more fully. But none of it had been particularly satisfying.

Not the way it was now, watching Will begin to pleasure himself, mind clouded by heat.

Comparatively speaking he was still the same feral child that had broken into the estate and brutally attacked six grown men - his eyes were still very wide, the sort of blue that seemed to change depending on the lighting, his mouth was soft and full, his curls as haphazard as ever. But Hannibal had noticed the changes earlier, driving back to the house, and he could see them more clearly now: the definition in his chest and stomach, the faint trail of hair skimming his lower belly. Will was growing, maturing. In no time at all he'd be a teenager.

*Facing all of the wants and warring desires one did at that age, an object of fantasy were he to attend any sort of public school.* The idea of it has Hannibal frowning. Even in his greatest imaginings, thinking about his life with Murasaki, about the art he'd create from death, he had never imagined Will anywhere else but with them, as though even considering Will mating with another was blasphemous.

*Perhaps that isn't so unusual. I do admire him, and I doubt there is anyone in this world who would be worthy of him. They couldn't understand him, couldn't begin to.*

"Hannibal." Will is moaning, pleasuring himself with reckless abandon. His other hand has drifted to his entrance, fingers plunging inside. Seeking for that place inside of him that will make him see whole galaxies. His voice has gone breathy, and his accent is back, the one he worked so hard to hide.

Captivated, Hannibal scoots closer, encouraging Will to pause and remove his robe so he can consume all of him fully. He almost can't understand it when Will begins speaking again, his words slurred. But Hannibal hasn't been idle these past few years - he learned enough to know that Will spoke English, and naturally had learned the language himself in school so there would no longer be a divide between them. "He's not you. It isn't fair. It- fuck! It should be you. I wanted you to win. I gave you everything. It's not fucking fair."

Admittedly, Hannibal has only felt small flashes of the emotion that is encircling him now. *Jealousy*. Strange to think how often that subject has come up in the past twenty four hours? Robert, so jealous of Hannibal that he had Will sent away to be hurt or lost in the streets of Paris. Murasaki, envious of Will to the point of malice, allowing it to happen. And now there was Hannibal, half-tempted to choke an answer from Will because he wanted to know who it

was he was crying out for now even as he spilled in his hand.

Will is boneless as Hannibal cleans him off, mindful of not hurting him when it hadn't been a concern before. It *certainly* is now. Just who could it be that Will is speaking of? True, it has been impossible to get a straight answer out of the boy in regards to his history, but he'd been a child when he had stumbled in to Hannibal's life. It wasn't possible that he'd known anyone in a biblical sense.

But worse things had happened in this world.

Completely blissed-out, Will seemed unaware of the fact that Hannibal's thoughts had taken a darker turn. He nuzzled up against him and began to purr, content and happy now that the pain had temporarily ceased. It wouldn't be long before it was back, and a darker part of Hannibal wanted to leave him now. To make him endure the rest of his heat alone for daring to-

*To what, exactly?* He didn't know. He only knew that the idea of Will wanting someone else was incredibly unappealing. *Whoever it is, they had best be wary, because if I find them they will suffer for it.*

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It has roughly been three days and Will's body has begun to wind down, though he remains delirious. Hannibal has managed to keep him fed and hydrated, but the experience was nothing like he had imagined.

Hearing Will call out for some unknown man, interspersed with calling for Hannibal, was maddening. Watching those pink lips part and clean the blood from his hands, knowing there was another on his mind... made worse when Will didn't let slip, not once, just who the mystery alpha was. And Hannibal had tried, numerous times, to extract such information from him while he was in such a weakened state, to no avail.

He was *still* trying.

Efforts to remain completely uninvolved, to remain solely an observer, had fallen to the wayside though he remained in control enough not to do more than touch - as he was doing now, stroking down Will's erection with one hand while the other probed teasingly at his slit. "You know you can tell me Will, I won't be angry."

"Fuck! Please Hannibal, please. Please just fuck me. It'll be okay just please-"

"You know I cannot, Will. It might hurt you. I don't want to hurt you."

"You bastard. You like hurting me." He whimpers, as if to emphasize his point. "Please, just your fingers at least, come on-"

"I just want to know a simple thing, Will. Who are you calling for so desperately? Perhaps I can bring him here."

“You! I want you, asshole!”

“*You* said it wasn’t me.”

“It could be! I don’t know for sure. Maybe- *Please*-” With a heavy sigh, more enraptured by the proceedings than he’s let on, Hannibal obliges Will and slides his index finger in to the narrow slit that, against all odds, is slick enough to offer little resistance. “Yes, yes, yes. Oh god yes. Please more. Hannibal I need more please give it to me. I’ll be so good. I can take your knot.”

Hannibal growls at the image, at the very idea. He’s never knotted anyone before. “It would damage you, giving you my knot now.” *A pity, that.* “What if I bite you instead? Would you like that, dear boy?”

There isn’t even a pause before Will is tilting his head and grabbing on to Hannibal’s shoulders, pulling him closer. “Yes. Please. Bite me, I need it so bad. Just you. Hannibal, please, *please*-” Only a saint or a madman could resist such temptation, and Hannibal is neither. He bites down hard on Will's neck, uncaring in this moment that it bonds them in a way that is unbreakable… should Will return the mark, that is. But when Will attempts to do just that Hannibal holds him down, forcing him to orgasm instead.

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Will sobbed against Hannibal’s chest, later. Wrung out and distraught because he knew, *knew*, that Hannibal did not claim him out of love or desire or compassion. *He just wanted to make sure nobody else could have me.*

Chapter End Notes

In a nutshell, what happens: Will masturbates and fingers himself while Hannibal watches. Hannibal gives him a handjob and also fingers him at one point.

# Grasping At Shadows

Chapter Notes

> Again, thanks to a-flickering-star for looking over this, even though I never get the chapters out in time because I am The Worst.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The bite on his neck is *obscene* , a glaring, screaming sign of ownership in the bright afternoon light of the parlor, but Will refuses to cover it. To hide it away as though it was something shameful. He especially will not conceal it for this conversation, though Lady Murasaki has politely offered to do it for him, as though he were too frail and helpless to do so himself and needed her guidance in this.

In fact, she's offered twice, as though hoping he is merely uncertain and shy and will acquiesce to the wishes of someone older and wiser than him

Instead Will sits sprawled on the sofa with his shirt half-unbuttoned and deliberately untucked in to his neatly pressed trousers, lounging in a way that makes her frown. It's childish, a small rebellion Will genuinely wishes he was above… but this is their first real encounter since his heat ended and he is feeling particularly petty towards her. *And not just her.*

Across from him, her gaze slips, flinching when it lands on the broken skin of his neck, the bruising still mottled with purple though it's begun to feather out to shades of green and yellow as it heals. He highly doubts the scar will be some pretty, delicate line upon his flesh. No, what Hannibal has left him will be a veritable mountain range, lacing across his pale skin in a show of heavy handed possession that leaves no doubts as to just who owns Will Graham.

There's a sense of victory in seeing her discomfort, knowing it distresses her in ways she cannot reconcile within herself. Part pity, part fear, part rampaging jealousy. It's nice to not be the only one embroiled in inner conflict, to be perfectly honest.

**"How are you feeling?"** Her voice remains steady, softly inquisitive. To her credit Lady Murasaki's behavior towards him since he emerged from his heat bed has been nothing short of impeccable.

His own might have been a bit more congenial (and a lot more smug) if Hannibal hadn't dropped him like a bad habit the moment his heat had cleared. *Then again, I'm not the only one he left behind on a last minute trip to Florence to supposedly take a look at the university there.*

Since Hannibal had bid them farewell, climbing in the back of a taxi with a casual wave, the household had been under a great deal of strain. There were noticeable bags under Murasaki's eyes, dark smudges of violet that no amount of powder would conceal. It attested to her own strain, but still she moved with such fluid grace, floating seamlessly from one task to another.

At that moment, she seemed intent on studying him, eyes watchful over the rim of a delicate teacup. Will couldn't decide if it was envy or concern he read there, or an uncomfortable mix of both.

**"Like I'm missing part of myself."** *Like I'm going to pull the world to pieces for doing this to me. No, not the world, just him.*

Without a pause, she takes another sip, the steam curling up from her tea in pale wisps, giving his words the thought and consideration she feels they deserve. She's been so careful of him, these past few days, a calm pillar in the storm surrounding them all, and Will hates how Chiyoh and Mischa seem to cling to her steadiness, because he can read it as a lie from a hundred yards away and it's aggravating that no one else sees it but him.

*At least if she was convincing I might take some comfort in it.* **"He will return. It is important that he advances his education."** *Ah, but which education do you refer to?*

His thoughts are so bitter now, almost defeated, but not quite. It hurts more than he cares to acknowledge that the battle isn't over. *This isn't how it was supposed to happen. I needed more time. If I was just a little bit older, Hannibal wouldn't be struggling so badly.* Will needs to believe that's all it is, even if the sinking feeling in his gut tells him otherwise.

**"What about you? How are you holding up after the... incident?"** It's a cruel barb, a cheap flash of the knife, and he *knows* it. But Murasaki doesn't seem nearly as rattled as one would expect a bonded omega to be after the death of their mate, and his curious mind clings to the distraction of that, wanting to prod at the wound to keep his thoughts clear of Hannibal's immediate departure and how much it aches to be parted from him.

**"I am grieving my husband, naturally."** It's a coy answer, but not one she might have given to an acquaintance. There is no artful sadness in her tone, a careful lowering of the eyes to denote grief. Instead there is an answer written in those words, one Will doesn't quite understand.

He presses harder. **"And your mate?"**

For a moment, he thinks his aggressive play has upset the game entirely, that she'll do as she's done before and quietly quit the room, radiating disapproval.

Will knows that he shouldn't care if she does, that her opinions should be meaningless. Yet each time she chooses to retreat he feels a sense of shame, followed quickly by anger because it isn't at all fair that she's able to get underneath his skin with so little effort on her part.

Perhaps it's because he's already struggling to keep afloat in the wake of feelings that Hannibal left behind him, head barely over water as he chokes on Chiyoh's uncertainty and

Mischa's outrage. Even Murasaki's bitterness and frantic scrambling make themselves known in his mind, scratching at the edges of his thoughts… he's had a headache almost constantly since that very morning, his defenses once again broken down. *This is why I lived like a hermit in the fucking woods. People are too loud.*

Yet Murasaki does not leave. She sets her cup down and regards him coolly, hands folded in her lap. Today she's wearing something he's never seen her in, a handmade kimono that is old enough to be an antique but obviously well cared for. Loved, even.

In all the time he's known her she's only worn fashionably made dresses and skirts, expertly tailored to her trim form. And all of it was the latest in design and decidedly Parisian in nature. Nothing of her homeland leaked through.

**"Robert never bonded with me."** The words break in to his musing, but Will can scarcely add them to the puzzle that is Murasaki and Robert. It just doesn't compute.

**"Never...?"** His mouth has fallen open without his permission. Sure, he'd seen the pale, unbroken skin of her neck for himself many times - he could see it now, in fact - but he'd never read into that because there were other places for an omega to be marked. It hadn't occurred to him that there was no mark to be seen because there was no mark at all.

The neck was seen as traditional, but more and more people preferred a mark in a less visible location, like the inner thigh or chest, and it seemed likely that Robert would prefer to hide such visual evidence of his more uncivilized side. *And yet...*

Murasaki nods, briefly solemn, confirming something that... *fuck. I don't want to feel bad for her! She could have gotten me killed. She is trying to take Hannibal for herself, without any of the consequences. She is NOT my friend. Only...*

**"No, he found it unseemly."** He didn't know how old Murasaki was, exactly... but he'd lived a *long* time without a bond before. He knew that it hurt, and that was without a mate and on suppressants.

That instinct rode him hell-for-leather sometimes, demanding that he bond if he wanted any kind of peace in his life. Without them, living with an alpha who had claimed her, but had not.... he honestly couldn't imagine what she'd endured. Without wanting to, Will found himself sympathizing with her, though he kept the feeling carefully shuttered away - knowing, without a doubt, she'd hate him for it. Murasaki was not a woman who desired pity.

Nor did he want to pity her.

After a moment, he found his voice again. **"May I ask you something?"**

**"Yes, of course."** The unspoken: *I owe you a debt I cannot repay.*

**"Why did Robert marry you?"**

In the three years since he's lived here, he's never understood that part. He'd honestly pegged

Robert as someone who didn't have any sort of sexual desires at all because the whole idea of it - the expression on his face each time Murasaki was in heat - ...he looked so *appalled* . Disgusted. Like he'd rather be anywhere else in the world.

**"You must understand. When an alpha reaches a certain age without bonding, it goes from something to admire to something to pity, and perhaps even distrust. Robert was always very careful about how others saw him, and I think he knew that he would have to take on a partner at some point."** Her voice is very matter of fact as she speaks, as though she is talking about someone else entirely. He wonders if she's removing herself from the narrative as a way to protect herself from the harsh truth of it. **"I was older than most omegas are when they first wed. Educated. I think he saw a kindred spirit in me. In the very least, he did not believe it would be a hardship to have me as his wife."**

She pauses, as though genuinely considering her next words. That she's being so frank with him is strange, but Will suspects she's telling him things she's never told anyone. Not even Chiyoh. Certainly not Hannibal - *he wouldn't have understood if she did.* **"For my part, I was... charmed by him, I suppose. He was gruff and sincere, and he did not mock me for my intelligence. He thought it admirable that I had worked hard to become a learned woman. He respected that achievement for what it was."**

The past tense is obvious, and Will finds himself staring down at his hands instead, chilled by the blank look in her eyes. His feelings for her had always been complicated, because in moments like these, seeing just how much damage she had endured - it was the type of damage most people never even considered. When it was talked about, there was always an edge of superiority, of mocking. As though emotional violence was something to openly scorn. *"It's not like he hit you." "Oh what, you're going to cry over that?" "So he yelled at you. At least you have a roof over your head, food in your belly. Maybe you should be a better partner and he wouldn't have to treat you like that."*

Given his nature, Will privately believed that that type of violence was almost worse than broken bones and bloody knuckles. At least there was proof of what the victim had endured. The scarring of a soul was much more difficult to discern.

**"When we came here, I would not say his expectations of me changed, only that I was unaware of them to begin with. He wanted me to assimilate completely. I was not to wear kimono, to speak in my native tongue. There were many rules put into place that first year, but I wanted to please him, and so I adapted."** Murasaki sighs softly, picking up her tea again. **"And then Hannibal came to us, with you and Mischa in tow."**

**"And you fell in love."** His response is instant - aggressive. He doesn't mean for it to be, to lash out, but he's never liked how his empathy makes him react, muddying the waters that were once so clear. It makes him feel like he isn't himself.

If she is offended, she gives no sign of it, only raising one brow slightly in question. **"I did."** That confirmation is a low blow, and they both know it, but she does not say the worst of it: Hannibal fell in love too. Will doesn't know if he should be grateful for that, or furious that she's held back. After a pause, she adds: **"You should hate me for it."**

**"I want to, believe me."** Leaning back in to the chair, Will fiddles with a bit of loose thread on the cushion, going over everything she's said - and more, everything she didn't have to say. **"But I know what it's like, when he focuses on you like that."** *It's like you're his whole world. You feel important, because Hannibal doesn't let anything touch him, not really, and to see that you **can** reach him is a heady feeling. Like sipping from a fountain of pure power.*

**"Just because I don't hate you though... it doesn't mean you're forgiven. What you did..."** He swallows the rest of that sentence, unable to force it out. But she needs to hear it, and what's more, Will deserves to say it. To acknowledge that she had tried to sacrifice him out of her own self-interest… to remind her that he wasn't so easily cast down.

**"When he first returned with you in his arms, I thought he might kill me for it. Perhaps he should have."**

Will scoffs at that, bluntly ignoring her guilt. **"There are better ways to hurt you. Ways that he can watch."** *Like leaving you with me, knowing I'd be hurt enough by his sudden absence to lash out at you. Trusting in my capacity to be cruel.*

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The police stop by for an interview, but it's clear that they consider it an open and shut case of *alpha interference* turned fatality. They don't even bother asking when Hannibal will return to Florence, taking Murasaki and Will's statements with disinterest and saying only that Hannibal should submit his own whenever convenient.

It says something about their society, that a man like Robert can be condemned for daring to interfere with another's property. Had he lived, Hannibal might even have been able to press charges against him.

Will can see it in their eyes, the slight approval that transfers over to him, because he's a symbol of what Hannibal did. The valiant alpha, saving his little mate. *It's fucking disgusting. I didn't need saving, and Hannibal didn't kill him for me. Not <u>only</u> me.*

When they leave Murasaki withdraws to her room, as she's done often in the past few days. Predictably Chiyoh is soon going up the stairs after her, fretting and doing her best to conceal it. Now that her true purpose in the house has been rendered obsolete, she's been feeling more and more uncertain about her place here. *As though Murasaki could ever let go of her.*

If Will wasn't so consumed by his own rather depressing prospects at the moment he might have tried convincing her of that. But it was so hard to care about anything but the leaden feeling in his belly, telling him that he'd been left, just like before. Only this time he couldn't chase after Hannibal, couldn't find him and follow him because Hannibal didn't want to be found.

*Ugh. Stop it!*

Rather than spend another day sulking in his room, Will heads out to the garden - not

surprised when he hears Mischa trailing behind him, her tread heavy and determined.

So far he's been able to neatly avoid her disappointment - mostly because it's clear it isn't him that she's upset with - but she *is* upset, confused and torn because she'd thought they were going to be a family for real, and Will does want to comfort her. Even if he doesn't feel like there's anything he can do to reassure her at this point, not when Hannibal remains free in the eyes of society, unmarked. Unclaimed.

And Mischa doesn't understand the why of it. She's so certain that Will and Hannibal are meant to be, like a fairytale story come to life. The woods had spat Will out years ago, allowed him to save her and Hannibal both, it seemed only fitting that they were fated to belong to one another. Yet Hannibal thought otherwise, and that frustrated Mischa.

And troubled her.

*Poor thing.* Hannibal's fidelity wasn't the only thing darkening her mind. Mischa was, at her core, as a loyal a creature as could be, steadfast in her devotion. But Hannibal had revealed parts of himself that no one could just blithely accept, and she struggled with combining those pieces with the brother she knew, trying to see how they all came together.

Not that she wasn't an endlessly clever little girl - quite the opposite - it's just… what Hannibal was, even now, a fledgling killer still figuring out his own mind… he was *vast* . Encompassing such a wide dominion of things that it was hard to see the whole of him. Even *Will* struggled - Will, with his all-seeing eyes and hunter's heart.

Others might have judged Hannibal out of hand, too small minded to even comprehend him, but Mischa was taking her consideration very seriously, always striving to be fair. To understand.

Will wonders if that's not why Hannibal really left - maybe he couldn't take the judgment in Mischa's eyes, knowing she very well might condemn him for good if the scales did not decide in his favor.

They both flop down on one of the stone benches, near the ornamental pond and the back wall, with Mischa curled tightly up against Will's side. He's content to sit quietly, and they sit there for a long time before Mischa raises her head and meets his eyes. **"What happened, Will?"**

*Why did he leave?*

*Why didn't you bond?*

*What's going to happen now?*

Will sighs, frustrated that's *he's* the one having to deal with the emotional fallout when it's Hannibal who has done this to them all, reshaped and unsettled their dynamics and then left them all in the dust to sort it out for themselves. *Like he always does.*

Not that it's not surprising - Hannibal has run from his feelings before, and he had to be confused now. And that confusion no doubt outweighed any desire he would have to watch them all trying to navigate the strange set of circumstances they found themselves in now.

Murasaki's betrayal had to hurt the most, of all that had occurred. Yet there was also Will now, a single flame suddenly appearing in the darkness, forcing Hannibal to consider him when before he'd been almost passive in what happened. Demanding his notice. Even before, Hannibal had never seemed to care for it when his plans went awry. (With Will and the chaos accumulated in his wake being the notable exception.)

And boy, had things ever gone off the beaten path.

Instead of Murasaki killing her husband, proving her commitment in the only way she possibly could in some grand, romantic gesture it was *Hannibal* who had ended Robert Lecter. In the process, Will had challenged whatever preconceived notions the man had about him and his place in his life. Will was no longer a sexless child, he was a possibility. Furthermore, Will's loose tongue had worked out in his favor in a way he hadn't foreseen - Hannibal seemed sure now that Will's formerly unquestioned loyalty might be straying elsewhere.

This Hannibal hadn't lived long enough to appreciate the unpredictable. It was natural that he sought isolation in order to decide for himself what his course of action would be.

**"I don't know, Mischa."** Another sigh, pulling Mischa close even though she squirms in his hold, annoyed that he's trying to coddle her.

**"Don't. Don't do that. I am not stupid. My brother killed my uncle for you. He hurt someone else too."**

**"He did."** He isn't going to lie to her. A better man might, but he knows that surviving in the world Hannibal is creating requires knowledge, a certain level of awareness, and Will won't leave Mischa blind. *Besides, it wasn't like Hannibal was hiding the truth from her either.*

Her eyes are so dark they're almost black, not like Hannibal's at all. In the right lighting his almost reflect red but Mischa's have hints of copper and amber instead, dark and luminous in the afternoon light. He wants to turn away from the frankness he sees in them, the imploring look that hurts to see on her face, because it means she's uncertain, maybe even afraid, and it's something Will can't protect her from. **"Is my brother a bad man?"**

**"Mischa... I don't even know if I believe in good or bad, some days. Not anymore. I used to have such a clear idea of what it meant. I knew what path I needed to be on to be righteous and just and good. But life isn't so cut and dry. Lines blur."** He can remember it all so clearly, even now. Their grand dance. **"I won't lie to you. Hannibal has done bad things. He's hurt people."** *That's an understatement of the fucking century.* **"He also loves you, very, very much. He sees the beauty in the world that so many people are too busy to stop and notice."**

**"Chiyoh thinks he's dangerous. I heard her talking to my aunt, she thinks they should**

**run away."** That news doesn't surprise him, but he doubts that Murasaki will find it in herself to abandon Hannibal. *She can't. It's too late to retreat, and she's so close to getting what she wants.*

**"She's not wrong."** Mischa is staring at her hands now, and Will gently picks them up in his own, squeezing gently. He waits until she looks back up before speaking again. **"I'm not afraid of Hannibal. Are you?"**

There's a heartbeat of a pause, and Mischa blinks once, but her voice is steady when she answers. **"I'm not. He won't hurt me. Even if I told the police, he would never hurt me. He loves me."** The way she says it, Will knows it isn't a comfortable feeling. Because Hannibal's love is never simple, never easy. There will always be hidden barbs just underneath the surface. *And once he has you, he won't let go.*

**"It's a heavy burden, his love."**

Mischa nods her golden head, more understanding of that than a child her age should be. **"He loves you too Will, I know he does. He's just... he is being very stubborn. And stupid. For someone who is so smart he doesn't see that. It makes me want to kick him in the shin!"** Her vehemence is charming, as always, and Will laughs at the image in his head. *My little knight, so quick to defend. Sometimes I wonder what you think is going to happen, if Hannibal does choose me.*

*Personally, I don't even dare to guess.*

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When Hannibal returns, he is soaring, uplifted by the city he has discovered, by the feelings it has stirred up within him. Whatever disquiet he'd felt upon leaving he seems to have vanished entirely - confidence restored in his ability to manipulate the situation to a scenario of his choosing.

Will idly wonders how many people he killed, to regain his sense of balance.

**"Mischa, you should see it! The soaring bridges, the channels. The very air is lighter, imbibed with a sense of- I almost cannot explain the feeling. Putting it into words is too crass. I cannot wait to show you, my little sweetheart, all of it."** He's holding her in her arms, smiling at them all like a victorious soldier fresh from the battlefield. As though he hadn't left devastation in his wake.

Will wants to hate him for that, for a lot of things, but in this moment... he's just relieved that he came back. Part of him had been terrified that he wouldn't, that he'd disappear and never return. That Will wouldn't be able to follow.

Hannibal's eyes drift from Mischa to Chiyoh, before settling on Will. Whatever he sees there prompts him to finally look at Murasaki, his smile becoming more smug as he does so. *He knows I haven't been the best company in the world. That she's spent the time he was away agonizing, praying for some sign that she can be forgiven. That it isn't too late. He's pleased*

*with her misery. Her distress.*

*He's such an asshole.*

**"I take it you've decided then?"** Her voice is tinged with concern, like she'd expected that Hannibal would discuss something so important with her first, even after everything. It's a stark reminder that she is *not* in Hannibal's good graces, at the moment, and Will takes a petty amount of pleasure in seeing her struggle to regain her footing.

**"How can I not go? The campus is divine, and the professors I spoke to wise beyond imagining. I believe it is the best place for me to continue my education."** He's arrogant, dismissive of her tone entirely, tickling at Mischa's belly instead, delighted when his sister laughs in response and buries her face against his shoulder. It's a touching scene, without the context.

With the context, it's like watching a slowly-scripted duel.

**"Might we speak, for a moment, without the children?"** Will can't help but glare darkly at her for that, annoyed that she has decided to use his age against him, as though she can convince Hannibal that Will can't offer what she can. *Like hell I can't.* He's about to argue, but Hannibal sets Mischa down, already agreeing. No doubt he's curious as to what she's going to say. Too curious to be subtle about it.

**"Will, would you take the girls upstairs? I thought we might all dine out tonight, a celebration of sorts."**

"Didn't realize we had anything to celebrate, Hannibal." The words are in English, confusing the women present, but he knows Hannibal understands him by the faint scowl.

Jerking his head in the direction of the stairs, he took Mischa's hand and didn't look back until they were on the landing. Simultaneously all three of them crouched near the corner, shamelessly agreeing to listen to the conversation between Hannibal and Murasaki without a word. They each clasped one another's hands tightly in dread, all knowing that their future depends on what is said next.

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**"You're certain then, about Florence?"** They remain in the hallway, Hannibal crossing his arms as though anticipating a fight. Will can't see Murasaki from this angle, but he imagines she's wearing a more placating expression, hoping to regain control of the situation before she loses her grip entirely. He wonders if she's shaking, if her heart rate is up. If she smells like fear.

Hannibal nods his head slightly, still aloof. **"I am."**

Murasaki comes into view, reaching out and touching his arm ever so gently - beseeching. Will wants to growl, to come barreling down the stairs and rip her hand off of *his* mate, but he resists. Giving in to his baser instincts isn't going to solve anything - and besides,

Hannibal would probably do something contrary,  just to prove he was still in control, and Will isn't about to nudge him in Murasaki's direction.

Also, he desperately wants to know what this is about more than he wants to defend his claim. Because she very clearly has an agenda. *Just what are you up to?*

**"Forgive me for saying this Hannibal but... might it be wiser to leave Mischa here?"** Beside him, Mischa gasps. **"There are no omega schools there, Hannibal. None that would teach her properly. And you will be very busy with your studies."** He doesn't want to think about what she's starting to imply, all the unspoken words fluttering like fireflies between the reasonable things she *does* say.

**"Are you suggesting that I leave her behind? And what of Will? That's what this is about, is it not? What I am going to do with Will?"** Murasaki's face flashes angrily before she hides the emotion, but Will sees it. So does Hannibal.

She is fighting two battles - the urge to protect Mischa, and possibly even Will, from the things Hannibal *needs* to explore about himself - but she also resents the mark Will wears on his neck, keenly so, and equally hates herself for that feeling. She is a woman unmoored, grasping at shadows in an effort to find a way to come out of this with her heart's desire.

Will *hates* that she is right, no matter her motivations.

Hannibal can't *become* with Mischa and Will underfoot. It burns that he hadn't considered it before, that it was Murasaki who figured that part out - even if she doesn't know why it's so important that Hannibal undergo this transformation. *She can't know.*

If she did, she'd do everything she could to prevent it, because this? Hannibal going alone to Florence? It is a pivotal moment, a part of Hannibal's life that shaped him into the man that so calmly responded the Will Graham of another life after being told he wasn't interesting: *You will.*

*Can I really let this happen? Let her convince him to leave us with her? She thinks she'll be able to make him forget about me if she just has the time and space to work, and she's willing to let him become a monster to accomplish that, not knowing that type of beast she's unleashing upon the world.*

*...but I do know. I know what he turns into. And I want that man back.*

**"I thought it went without saying that he would remain here."** She has moved closer to Hannibal, smiling faintly at him, almost cajoling. This is a different side of her, one never displayed before when she was not a free woman. Flirtatious. **"It isn't as though you meant to claim him, Hannibal. He is not for you."**

**"Rather bold of you, *Aunt*."** To his credit, Hannibal steps away from her, eyebrows drawn together in annoyance. He doesn't like the idea of leaving Mischa and Will behind, where he cannot protect them. He dislikes even more that she's trying to manipulate him, but Murasaki soldiers on, stepping forward.

**"This part of your life is about self-discovery, Hannibal. I wouldn't want to rob you of that."**

Beside him Mischa is vibrating with outrage, and Chiyoh doesn't seem much better off. Will isn't sure what expression he's wearing, but it feels like a snarl.

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It isn't until much later in the evening, after everyone has bedded down for the night, that Will sneaks downstairs and knocks on Hannibal's door. He doesn't want to do this while he's so wrapped up in despair and resentment… yet he can't find it in himself to be the patient fisherman. Not right now.

When Hannibal opens his door, he is briefly surprised. Almost as though he expected someone else. *You know, someday I'm going to remind you of this. And of every moment before it. Every time you hurt or betrayed me by wanting her instead.* Politely, he gestures for Will to come in, but neither speak.

He's never been in this room before, Robert's strict feelings on the matter not worth pushing, but it's comforting to see the lush jewel tones, the heavy dark furniture. It reminds him of home, however distant that is now. It steadies him for what he needs to say.

Taking a deep breath, he turns to face Hannibal, this man who owns so much of him. **"You claimed me."** *And then you left, so quickly there might as well have been a dust cloud drifting behind you.*

**"I was thinking of your safety. With a mark on your neck, you would be safe from any further actions such as the one my uncle took."** Will wants to shake him, because Hannibal is using his I'm Being Perfectly Reasonable It's A Pity You Don't Understand voice.

*Two can play at that game.* **"But he was already dead, and you knew that. So who were you saving me from, Hannibal?"** Though there's more challenge in his tone than he intended, Will can see that Hannibal didn't expect to be questioned. *Did he really think I'd let him do this to me, that I'd just take it?*

**"You are so very bright Will, and singular. There are very few in this life who can appreciate your many contradictions. I thought to spare you from that."** He hesitates, before he shifts towards the window, wearing nonchalance like a poorly fitted suit. **"Though it appears my actions came too late, if your words are to be believed."**

**"So what, you don't want me, but no one else can have me?"** The incredulous tone of his voice is genuine - he can't believe Hannibal has really convinced himself that Will needs protecting from the world.

**"You belong here, with me. And Mischa. We are a family, Will."**

**"But you don't want me. Not in that way."** The sting of those words is bright and burning,

but Will finds himself saying them regardless, because it needs to be said.

**“You are very young, Will. Too young to understand-”** Again, he’s trying to emphasis (most likely to himself) that Will is too young, that he’s a *child* . And Will is finished with allowing that line of thinking to continue.

**“I understand perfectly, Hannibal.”** He says his name like it’s something distasteful, causing Hannibal to tilt his head in confusion, surprised by Will’s bitterness. Whatever he expected from this conversation, from his actions during Will’s heat, it wasn’t Will demanding to be treated as an equal. **“But if you think a mark on my neck is going to keep him from wanting me, you sorely underestimate my value to others. Because he won’t care.”**

Finding that he’s had just about all he can stomach of Hannibal Will turns and heads for the door, only to be stopped by Hannibal’s voice - deceptively gently, for the metaphorical knife in the back that they are. **“And just who is he, exactly? This man you called out for so piteously?”**

**“I’m trying to find him.”** Will can’t look at him. He *can’t.*

**“And when you do?”**

**“I expect we’ll find out.”** Grabbing the door handle he forces himself to look back and is rewarded by the sight of one Hannibal Lecter, frozen with indecision. Conflicted. It’s incredibly mollifying. **“After all, what does it matter to you anyway? You don’t want me, isn’t that right? Seems I need to find somebody who does.”**

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Will is furious, but quietly so. After three long weeks of discussion, of heated debates and disagreements and slammed doors, it has been decided: Hannibal will be going to Florence alone. He's downstairs right now, waiting for the driver to load his things in to the taxi so that he can head to the airport. *He's leaving me. He's fucking leaving.*

Instead of saying goodbye, Will is locked in his room. He refuses to say those words. He already knows they feel like ash and he's said goodbye to Hannibal one too many times as it is. He can't do it again.

He hates that he's letting this happen, that he didn't fight it, but Will has always been very good at the long game. Instant gratification is nice, but this is *serious* . He's playing for keeps and that means making sacrifices. *I know I won't get the man I loved back, but every step he takes in Florence brings him closer to being who he was. Hell, it might even help him see her for what she is. The dissonance between the fearful acceptance she is offering and the eagerness in me.*

*I have to let him go.*

*But what am I going to do?* He still doesn't know. Mischa isn't speaking to him once he'd

made it clear that he wouldn't fight Hannibal's decision or even try to sway him - she isn't speaking to Murasaki or her brother, either, convinced that all adults are foolish. *"You both are looking away from happiness Will! And you, you're doing it on purpose! At least my brother doesn't understand that!"*

He's given very serious thought to leaving. To letting Hannibal grow accustomed to the idea of his absence. But he's afraid that Hannibal will let him go. (He knows he *won't* , but what if he *does* ?) There's also Mischa to consider, and how bereft she'd be if both of them abandoned her. She might never forgive him for running away.

But underneath, there is something stirring, something he's been thinking about more and more these days, since the idea of separating from Hannibal had made itself at home in his head. What if this is his only chance to really explore the darkness within himself? To find out what kind of creature he'd grown into being without interference from Hannibal?

Chapter End Notes

I know some of you were curious if Hannibal/Will would separate at some point, and as you can see, they are. I feel like I don't say this enough but this IS Hannigram endgame, so don't despair, we're just moving in to the Murder Portion of life? Also this might be longer than 15 chapters. We'll have to see, because this was supposed to have a whole other part attached to it, but now there's another part in between this one and that part... I don't know.

# Bad Men

Chapter Notes

> You'll see I added a few more chapters to this, potentially, though I'm spitballing as to the actual length. Longer than 15, for sure.
>
> Anyway, this is kind of... experimental? It's choppy on purpose. There's going to be another time jump but I wanted to fill in the gaps a little. I thought about putting this in it's own thing as a drabble but eh, it's going here. Why not. Also not beta read because I didn't have time to work on this at all until today soooo my apologies there.
>
> Also I know it's short, I was going to go back and forth between Will and Hannibal but it ended up being too much.
>
> ALSO ALSO: I'm going to start taking prompts for some drabbles from this story. Full disclosure that I may not use all of the prompts, or may use them in other ways, but I'm curious about parts you'd like to see. I already have some ideas, but I'm open to others!

He doesn't begin right away. The burn of Hannibal's absence is a sting keenly felt, and Will allows himself a week or two to mope. It's not the sort of luxury he's used to having, to be honest. It feels strange, lounging in bed, staring out the window for hours.

Murasaki tip toes around his presence like he's fragile, wary of his movements. Dipping into her mind, it's easy to see himself as she sees him: someone on the verge of breaking, requiring delicate handling. *He is a strange child, but a child still. Hannibal won't forgive me if he hurts himself.*

Bitterly, it makes Will think of Jack. Of Alana. They hadn't seen him either, but somehow he'd expected better of Murasaki.

*Then again, she hasn't seen me with Dragon's blood in my mouth.*

*If she had, she'd be a country and a half away, praying to a god she doesn't believe in that I don't come for her next.*

For her part, Mischa has already forgiven him. Like secrets, grudges are something she cannot hold. Instead of lashing out in anger she curls up against his side and reads, puppy-soft and so patient with his grumbling. She brings him tempting little sweets, laughs at his terrible bedhead... if anything, her presence is an excuse to not go through with it, not right away. A crutch. *She's going to be so disappointed in me when I give in.*

They spend hours in the garden instead, or walking through the city, Chiyoh reluctantly

following.

Since Hannibal's departure she has been a constant at Murasaki's side, but it is a burden on her, that responsibility. Little by little it is draining her clear away, worrying so hard about the future of her mistress that she can't think of herself. She's dropped weight. Mischa sees it too and insists that Chiyoh come with them on their explorations. They're the Three Musketeers from the stories she fawns over, a village of three standing under the tempest that is Hannibal and Murasaki's rather silent war.

But it can't last forever. Already it's burning in his bones, the need to rend, to tear, to destroy... to *create*. The opportunity comes to him during one of their little adventures. Mischa wants to find something to send to Hannibal to congratulate him on completing his first semester, something distinguished, and Chiyoh and Will are there with her of course, where else would they be?

Murasaki disappeared early in the morning, leaving only a note on the sideboard in the hall.

There's a man in the shop, watching as Mischa's snub nose presses against a glass case, studying the cufflinks within with a discerning eye. He hasn't stopped looking at them, from one to another. Appraising. With a glance at Chiyoh, Will sees that she's noticed his covetous eyes too. Three little omegas, unaccompanied by a guard. Tempting, for a man like that.

Will rarely gets such a reaction from others, the heavy scar on his neck a deterrent - if an alpha was willing to damage their own omega in that way, there is no telling what he'd do to anyone who touched his property - but their watcher, his eyes keep catching on that scar. The challenge of it. Without even thinking Will allows himself to step into his mindset, curious about what darkness he's hiding.

*It would be quite a coup, going from zero to three. The little one hasn't even hit her first heat yet. And the boy... imagine how angry his alpha would be. He hasn't had a chance for a real, bloody fight in so long. And there's something appealing about his softness, all curls and big eyes. He's always liked the willowy look of male omegas. The other one is a bit short for his liking, but there's a bluntness to her he likes. A sharp edge. Such a prize, to catch them all. And omegas are so loyal to their own - he'd just have to grab the small one and the others would follow him into hell, he's sure.*

Will blinks, forcing himself to look away, meeting Chiyoh's narrowed eyes. They've developed a bit of a shorthand with one another, small gestures with their hands and bodies. They needed it to survive Robert. A language unspoken, used now. *That man is dangerous.*

Chiyoh raises a brow knowingly. *He'll go for Mischa.*

He shifts in place, tilting his head towards the pavement outside, overflowing with people. *We'll stop him. Stay on the busy streets. Lead him home.*

*Home?* There's disbelief in the way she crosses her arms, but Will is confident. Sure. Ready.

*Trust me.*

---

Slipping in to the role of the hound is easier than he likes, like shrugging on an old, over-worn coat. He knows it. Hates it too, but it serves his purpose regardless, because it's only as Jack's hound that he can find the what he seeks in this wide city. Killers, rapists, bullies.

*Bad men*, as Mischa would say.

*The cruel*, in Chiyoh's eyes.

A voice whispers in the back of his mind, amused. *You know they're all pigs, Will.*

Will goes hunting, but it isn't for pork. Tonight he wants wolf.

---

The first he savages in an alley, in all the ways the man imagined he'd do to the three helpless little omegas he'd spotted.

A mugging gone wrong, the papers say, as Murasaki sips her coffee and tuts to herself.

Will's knuckles are still bruised and bloody, but he's always so cold, the gloves he wears now aren't unusual enough to warrant comment. When he peels them back later the blood has seeped through the bandages, stinging and sharp. He likes it.

---

The second isn't one of Mischa's Bad Men. He's tall, whippet-thin. When he speaks Will can imagine the plaster covering his words, just as fake as the rest of him. It isn't enough for Will, the man is just a bookie and a con artist... until he finds out about the dogfighting.

That night he feeds him to the dogs curled up in the man's basement before sewing up the stab wound on his ribs - a glancing blow, but it hurts like hell. *Good thing he didn't take me seriously. Could have been much worse.*

At his side one of the dogs licks his hands, hungry for more.

He wants to take them home, but settles for letting them loose in the city. If he calls the police, they'll just be put down.

At least they have a chance.

---

*Wrong. Something went wrong. Fuck, fuck, fuck!* Will crawls through the window, clutching his sore ribs and wiping at the blood on his mouth. He doesn't expect the light to turn on, for Chiyoh to be there scowling at him, arms crossed tightly against her chest. **"Will!"** Even

though she's whispering, the words hurt, grate against his senses.

With the efficiency of someone who has cared for the injured before, she leads him to the bathroom and helps set him to rights. They don't speak. Don't acknowledge the tears running down Will's cheeks.

**"Nothing is broken."** Her voice is carefully neutral. Cautious.

**"I know."** *God, how stupid can I fucking be? I knew it was a bad idea. But I missed him so much. And he was a perfect choice for the Ripper.* **"Can you help me to my nest, Chiyoh? I need... I need..."**

It isn't in her nature to pry, Will knows that and counts on that, wincing as she helps him over to the little door, opening it up so he can crawl inside. **"I'll be fine Chiyoh."**

The door shuts without a response. Which, really, what could she say? *You're a liar, Will Graham?*

Breathing heavily he manages to lie back on the sunken mattress. His ribs are aching, likely just bruised which means he'll have to be careful for the next few weeks. His eye is probably blackened but he can't be bothered to dig some ice out of the little fridge to keep the swelling down. *At least my nose stopped bleeding.* Overall, his physical injuries are few, compared to his other hunts.

Emotionally, it's another story.

He'd gotten it into his head that he was going to kill somebody like Hannibal might. Just to see. To *know*. It was stupid, and he *knew* it... but if he couldn't have the real Hannibal, and if the new version was off finding himself via murder in Florence, then he could have the one in his mind, right? And the target had been perfect: a wealthy socialite who had knocked Mischa down in the store, rolling her eyes and stomping off in her $600 heels like she was untouchable.

Hannibal would have wanted her choke on her own tongue.

And so Will had broken into her house. They'd fought - she'd had some self defense classes, which he hadn't counted on - but he'd got her down pretty quickly. Then he'd closed his eyes and allowed himself to think about the Ripper for the first time since he'd come to this timeline. It felt *good*. Like he could feel Hannibal guiding him in the kill, helping him drag it out, make it beautiful. Make it art.

When it was done, when he'd taken everything, Will had snapped out of his haze with startling clarity, falling back against the dresser because he'd... oh *god*. She was spread out on the floor, stripped of her skin, her hair, her teeth. Like a butterfly pinned to a board he'd used her large collection of stilettos to complete the effect, the tapered ends digging all the way through to the floor like macabre nails. Replacing her hair with expensive scarves, he'd been inspired to dress her in a designer dress, black and striking against the sticky gore underneath. He'd reduced her to the only things that mattered to her, the window dressing.

Getting home was a blur.

"He'll notice this, Will." Turning his head, he can see that much beloved face, and knowing it isn't real doesn't keep his throat from tightening up.

"I know."

Hannibal turns, regarding him sharply. Curiously. Will had always been Hannibal's favorite puzzle. "Is that why you did it?"

They're talking about the other Hannibal, of course, The lesser version of the one he can see now. Incomplete, but every day working towards that ideal. He might be in Florence, but he kept up with the news. With his special interests. There's no way he won't hear about this. Will swallows, ignoring the tears building up in the corner of his eyes. "I wanted to see what would happen."

Stepping closer and kneeling beside him, Hannibal smiles, just at the edges. "My Will." When he reaches out, it feels real, the hand against his cheek. "You've been grieving, haven't you? Mourning my passage."

"Yes."

"All these long years alone, telling yourself it wasn't time yet. Giving your heart time to hurt less - but it never did, did it?"

"*No*."

"He is the only one capable of filling that void within you, who can understand you." Carefully, Hannibal's hand moves down, thumb brushing against his lips, skimming down his neck and chest, resting against his belly. "You've always been a fisherman Will. That is your strength." A pause, almost thoughtful. "That did not change, not even when you fell in to this world without me."

"I know."

"You're going to have to let me go, Will. Perhaps not now, not when your love for me is such a valuable weapon against him. But he will not settle for anything less than the whole of you, dear Will. I know I would not."

"I know, I *know*." Oh god, he's crying now. Really crying, heavy sobs that shudder throughout his frame. "I don't want to."

"You are going to make him worthy of you, Will. If anyone can, it is you." Hannibal leaned down, pressing his mouth against Will's forehead. "And I will be here with you, so proud. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes."

But Hannibal is already gone.

---

Because he is young, his body still falling in to it's natural rhythm, Will's knows he won't have regular heats every three months. Not quite yet. He doesn't worry until five months come and go, and suddenly he can feel it again. The irritation, sweaty-limbed and so *hungry*. He only wastes a few quick minutes writing to Hannibal before asking Chiyoh and Mischa to help him ready his room, handing the note to a frowning Murasaki.

It's a short note, hardly even a sentence.

*Don't come.*

---

In another city, overlooking an ancient plaza, Hannibal frowns at the note in his hand.

---

The next kill is easier, because Will does not allow himself to be the Ripper. To be Hobbs or Stammets or any of the killers he's collected in his mind. Instead, he embraces the man that was born on the edge of a cliff. The feral grace of that monster has the potential to rock Paris to it's foundations if he isn't careful, but Will can't find it in himself to stop the work. Even when Mischa finds out, the despair and sorrow in her eyes as she helps him sew up a wound on his back... he won't stop.

**"My brother has touched your heart in all ways, hasn't he Will?"**

**"Yes, Mischa."**

**"I am sorry for it."**

**"I'm not."**

**"I'm sorry for that too."** She sighs, dabbing at the drying blood. Focused on healing him.
**"Are they Bad Men, Will?"**

**"It doesn't feel right if they aren't."**

He isn't even lying. The creature that he has become is soaked in righteousness.

**"Just be careful Will. I don't want to lose you to this."**

---

Letters flow back and forth between the Lecter Household and Florence, easily as air. Phone

calls too. But Will only offers Hannibal his silence. He's afraid if he does not his resolve will snap clean in half. It's only been a year, but Will is beginning to drown. His nightmares are back with a vengeance, and he's started getting sicker. Eyeing his trembling hand, Will doesn't need to be told what is happening to him. He'd tasted the edge of it before when he woke up in Louisiana.

He's Wasting, and it's getting worse

---

**"I won't forgive you if you tell him, either of you."**

**"But Will-"**

**"No Mischa. If he wants me, then he'll come for me. I won't have his pity. I *won't*. Promise me. You too Chiyoh."**

They promise.

---

*I miss you Hannibal. Please come home for my birthday, please? You've already worked so hard. A summer off won't hurt you.*

It seems simple, that message, but Hannibal grows uneasy at the sight of Mischa's no-nonsense cursive. It feels like she's trying to tell him something, something of great importance. It has been two years since he's spent any significant time in Paris, choosing to take an accelerated set of courses, to experience everything Florence has shown him in full... but perhaps that was unwise?

Murasaki was correct in sending him here alone, and he is grateful to her for that.

But seeing her now, it is... it makes him feel sorrowful, mourning the past in a way that is unexpected and unpleasant. Because he sees it now, how impossible his hopes had been. How unreasonable. He finds in Florence what was always missing, the final piece that he needed to truly transform. To create. But he also finds truth.

His aunt will never fight for him. And he can't settle for anything less.

Such musing is broken by a knock at the door, as though thinking of her has summoned Murasaki from the ether. He knows it's her, can see her through the bright, open windows in his little parlor. The question is, what is her purpose?

*And why do I feel as though Mischa is terrified?*

# Eyes Up To God

Chapter Notes

> Fair warning, I'm going on vacation form the 14th-21st, so the next update won't be until the 28th. That's why this one is hella long.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*He is a savage creature, isn't he?* Those are Hannibal's first thoughts when his eyes set upon Will Graham after nearly two years.

He had visited, naturally, coming to Paris during holidays or having Mischa come to him in Florence, but Will had always been tellingly absent. Their only real contact came from the occasional letter or postcard - always tersely written, hardly more than two sentences long. The easy comradery that they'd shared before Will's heat seemed to have abandoned them both.

Initially, Hannibal thought it had been stubborn pride, and so, though it had made him uneasy, he had allowed such childish behavior, confident that Will would come to see the wisdom of Hannibal's decisions. That had *not* happened and as time went on Hannibal grew simultaneously disillusioned with Murasaki and enraptured with his newfound calling - with the work he did, in the quiet, sleep-soaked streets of Italy.

Still, he expected to be called. Summoned to Will's heat bed if nothing else. But he was *not*.

After that first missive it hadn't been spoken about at all, though Hannibal had broached the subject tentatively with his aunt once and been told that Will preferred to be alone.

And wasn't that something? An omega, claimed and marked, enduring a heat alone? It didn't seem particularly feasible, and Hannibal can admit that he hired men to watch the house roughly around the times he expected Will to fall prey to his heat, expecting that Will's mystery suitor might come and claim him for his own despite the mark on his neck warning others away.

It was unsettling, the game they played at such great distances, but also enticing.

And now it had, for the time being, come to an end with Hannibal's decision to take the summer off. He wondered what changes might come about now that he would be here full time. *He's due for another heat in August, if I'm correct. Will still he choose to suffer alone when I am under the same roof?*

Before this moment, standing awkwardly in the hall, Hannibal hadn't expected that he'd want to tend to Will's needs more than necessary. Now that he'd experienced more of life, and

come down from his romantic idealization of Murasaki, he was beginning to suspect that romantic relationships were not for him. That no one would be worthy of him.

Seeing Will made him question that, but only somewhere deep in his mind; in that place a rabbit twitched its ears in the direction of a strange sound in the woods, but otherwise remained still in the tall grass. His mind worked in such a way that he almost couldn't process all that he took in - more so when it came to his own emotions, which felt foreign and unwelcome, like intruders in his orderly domain of death and beauty - but that didn't mean he did not account for changes in his perceptions, even if it took some time for him to acknowledge properly.

He isn't thinking of that now, though. Instead his mind had fastened upon how nervous and ill at ease Mischa seemed, even as she ran forward to hug him at the waist. She'd grown since he'd seen her last, at least a few inches, her face sharper and more defined. Behind her Murasaki and Chiyoh are stood together, and behind them is Will, half swallowed by shadows.

Murasaki looks bleak.

---

When she came to visit him in Florence - nearly a month ago now - he can admit that he had a moment of weakness. She was his ideal in so many ways, a lovely compliment to his ferocity. But he'd learned too much about himself when they had been parted. He could see it on her face, even as she reached out to brush her fingertips against the scar on his nose, how *afraid* she had become.

How afraid she always had been.

In retrospect it had been so *clear*, how little she could appreciate the man he had become. That she can see the change in him and only knows to fear it, and it left a bitter taste in his mouth... yet he'd kissed her. Taken that one small thing for his younger self.

He knew, despite her hesitation and terror, she'd have given in to his advances, had he made them. Her mouth had melted against his, sugar-sweet, and her body was pliant. Accepting. The knowledge that he *finally* could have had the woman after what felt like a century of dancing around it was a heady thing, red wine on an empty stomach, but Hannibal recognized that the man he was now could not succumb. She wouldn't survive it, if he did.

Instead, he'd stepped back and politely ushered her inside, much to her surprise.

She hid it well, graciously smoothing the silk of her dress as she sat on his delicate sofa and smiling at him in a way that felt forced. He wondered at that, having never seen Murasaki feel awkward or out of place. *Whatever has compelled her to my doorstep makes her extremely uneasy.*

Because she was Murasaki, he knew she was not here merely to attempt to seduce him. She is there officially for something practical, he knows it without her speaking a word - she's

always fighting on two fronts - but it's obvious she also meant to try and sway him one final time, before his nature eclipsed him completely.

It turned out she had been seeking official paperwork for Will so that he might be properly enrolled in school. **"He is so bright, I fear that my teachings do not do him justice."**

She'd continued, explaining that she had hired a detective and what he'd found was... troubling. **"Your father, he never spoke of Will's origins?"**

Though there had been plenty of opportunity to do so, Hannibal has never spoken of Will's strange appearance in his life. Almost as though it would be bad luck - a strange enough concept, but he'd never questioned it. He does not enlighten her now. **"One day he was simply there, as though he always had been."**

**"I'm afraid... I believe he was procured for you, Hannibal, rather than given in agreement."** He says nothing, blinking slowly and watching as she struggles to say things in a way that will not make him angry - mistaken in her belief that he will defend his father when it comes to such a claim. **"The detective I hired tracked him to Louisiana, and there he uncovered a missing person's report. It appears that he'd been in foster care during that time and had simply vanished."** She offers it to him, this rare gift, the value of which she does not understand.

So much slips by her now, the meaning impossible for her to comprehend, a language she can hear but has never learned. It is beyond her.

Hannibal has always been hungry for the pieces of his history that Will has deliberately kept to himself, and this is *such* a piece, wet and gleaming in his hand, the glossy paper revealing Will as he had been, too-thin and grinning at the camera as he held up a trout the size of his arm. He's missing one of his top front teeth, a charming gap, and Hannibal runs a thoughtful finger over the image.

The photo is of a younger Will, younger than he had to have been when he arrived in Lithuania, perhaps seven or eight, though it is hard to judge given his small stature. Beside the photo is information, including his birthday. Such a small detail, but Hannibal is glad for it. Satisfied to know for certain that Will is fifteen, that in November he'll be sixteen. That he was born in Michigan and has one living parent who is quoted on the page: *"Will is a very smart kid, he skipped a grade and likes dogs and tomato soup. I miss him like hell."*

He clears his throat, unwilling to let her see that he is moved by all the simple poster has revealed to him. **"You believe he was stolen?"**

He manages to convey the right amounts of doubt, while still seeming to consider her proposal. From the way he fought the night Robert had tried to exile him, Hannibal doubts that Will had been stolen by anyone. But running? Will was more than capable of that. The question then became: *why would he run? What was he running from? Or to?*

**"Yes."**

Setting the flyer down, Hannibal regards her with cool eyes. **"It's always possible. My father was very concerned about my prospects."** He can admit there's a certain thrill in this, obscuring the truth with honesty. Because he has not lied to her. His father *had* worried, but not for ordinary reasons.

It went without saying that the former Count Lecter believed Hannibal would kill any omega that he brought home, and had it been someone local...

There is also a folder, which she graciously hands to him. Will's origins are laid out rather neatly, in ten pages. The sum of who he had been. Hannibal has always been curious and cannot conceal it now, pouring over the finer details. It confirms that Will was, if not abused, in the very least mistreated by his father. Neglected to an alarming degree. Taken by authorities more than once before he vanished into nothingness.

Yet how was it that this boy, this one omegan child who had never left the country... how had he managed to fly halfway across the world and fend off brutal attackers, all to save Hannibal, someone he had no knowledge of?

He turns his attention to Murasaki, closing the folder and setting it beside him on top of the flyer. **"What does this mean for Will?"** Because that, of course, is the issue at hand. Hannibal isn't sure of the legalities but a stolen omega seems like something the authorities would concern themselves over.

**"The local police gave up their search after six months. They felt that, even if he were alive, the likelihood of him being unclaimed was very low."** She lowers her head, acknowledging the plight of her sex before she revealing the verbal knife in her hands. **"A bonded mate cannot be returned home."**

**"Will is *not* my bonded mate."** Hannibal has seldom experienced fear, but he thinks that might be the beginnings of it, stirring in his mind like a hive of bees.

**"No, he is not."** Which meant his position was precarious. Should the wrong person discover him, Will could be sent home. A whole ocean away from Hannibal.

---

*That* is what brought him back to Paris, alongside Mischa's plea. Hannibal was determined to unearth Will's secrets at long last, to dig out and discover everything there was to know about the boy who had altered his life so completely in ways he couldn’t fully understand.

Only, the coltish boy he'd left behind had grown - still painfully young, but more of a young man now. Broader in the shoulders, his facial features emerging from the last remnants of baby fat.

And he was fading.

The moment he came in to view was jarring, and the *wrongness* of it scratched at the back of Hannibal's mind. There were dark circles under his eyes, his skin was waxen and pale. He

looked *ill* and Hannibal took offense to it, by how unprepared he was to see *his* Will in such a state. No one had mentioned it to him and his concern outweighs his initial impression of Will that counseled caution.

**"Will?"** He steps away from the comfort of Mischa's arms, and she does not hold him. *This. This is what had her so afraid. She cannot stand the idea of losing him.* Immediately, his gaze lands on Murasaki, demanding answers from this woman he tried so hard to trust, after everything. **"What has happened to him? Why was I not told he was unwell?"**

**"I did not wish to disturb your... studies."** Her pause is clear, a tiger pit lined with pointed stakes. Will won't look at him, flinches away when Hannibal comes closer and reaches out.

**"Don't touch me."** Mischa comes up, taking Will's hand and pressing herself against his side, helpless and weak with it. She doesn't know how to fix this and turns desperate eyes to Hannibal, confident he can repair the damage he has wrought upon Will.

He can see how hard she has been struggling to be brave, can only imagine what it has been like for her to watch Will decline in this manner. *I didn't know. Mischa, I swear I did not know.*

**"He wants to help you, Will."** She is plaintive, as close to pleading as Hannibal has ever seen her, but Will only shakes his head, the curls lank and heavy against his cheeks. Overgrown and oily, left untended to like the rest of him.

**"I don't want his help, pup."** He is more gentle with Mischa as he detangles himself from her, ruffling her hair briefly before standing on his own. **"May I be excused?"** That his eyes go to Murasaki first *hurts*, and Hannibal feels the first bright flare of anger, but his aunt is quick to offer a nod of her head and Will leaves them without another word, almost vibrating with rage.

He might be a pale wraith of who he *should* be, but his soul has not dimmed.

Hannibal turns to Murasaki, this woman he'd once wanted so badly he could hardly think, and wonders at her purpose. It's clear to anyone that Will is Wasting. That he has been for some time. It's rare for an omega to Waste when they are not completely bonded, but Will has always been unique. There's no telling the damage it has done to him to be left in this state for so long. Ignored. Abandoned. And Murasaki *knew*.

Perhaps she told herself she was protecting the young omega in her charge. She knew better than anyone what Hannibal's impulses could do when unchecked - just as she knew that his Becoming involved so much more than a medical degree. He very easily could have killed Will for hampering him in any way, for seeing something he should not.

She couldn't know the violence Will had already seen - and indeed, the damage he'd inflicted with his own two hands. Yet Hannibal felt very strongly that she had another motive, even if she'd deny it to the core of herself: if Will Wasted, if he *died*, then Hannibal would be free.

He takes a very careful step towards her, mindful of Mischa's presence. **"How long?"**

**"I can’t be certain... since that first week, after you left. It wasn’t apparent right away, he has always kept things hidden. It has gotten worse, in the past year."** *Two years*. Two years she'd allowed this to happen. Cautiously she closes the distance between them, taking his hand between hers, beseeching. **"He asked me not to tell you. He didn't want you to know."** Though Hannibal believes this is the truth, *it isn't enough.*

---

With little choice he finds himself compelled to find the little omega that had suffered so much for him, unsettled and annoyed that once more Will has drawn emotions from him without any effort at all.

He isn't in his room - a sad, stripped down place that reminds Hannibal more of a cell than a place of comfort and relaxation - but down the hall he can hear a sound in the library. As he draws nearer he recognizes the heavy cough for what it is.

When an omega begins to Waste, their immune system starts to breakdown. It's a slow process, but they are more prone to illness. After two years it is a miracle Will can leave his bed at all, that he isn't malnourished and half out of his mind. Hannibal has read case studies before, of how Wasting can affect the mind, cause hallucinations, vivid delusions. Distorting reality until the omega (or, more rarely, alpha) in question no longer knows what is real.

Yet for all that, Will seems painfully lucid, sitting in one of the stuffed chairs near the unlit fireplace, flipping through an old book. **"Will?"** His body tenses, but he doesn't turn to face him. Nor does he respond. **"I think it's time we had a discussion, you and I."**

**"Why not, we've always been good at conversations."** Sullenly, Will tosses the book to the floor, and Hannibal notes there are several others there already, as though Will can't find it in himself to care. Maybe he can't. He has been fighting this, but after two years the cost of it is beginning to show. He can't endure this forever.

Hannibal spitefully wants to ask what became of the man Will had cried for, years ago, when he was vulnerable and too weak to be evasive, but he recognizes the impulse as petty and squashes it down. Strangely he finds that he is afraid of the answer Will might have given him. **"Murasaki tells me you asked her to hide your condition from me."**

**"I did."**

**"Why?"** For a fleeting moment, he can see honesty perched on the edge of his tongue, but then the moment is gone and Will shrugs and looks away, as though this is another thing that is no longer worth his notice. As though his life was of little consequence.

**"Why does it matter?"**

Hannibal is careful as he approaches, reminded of that first impression again as Will shifts to regard him with glittering eyes. This is not someone to underestimate. *Beware*. **"You could have died. Even now, your body is slowly shutting itself down."**

**"Spare me the bullshit, Hannibal. You wouldn't have been too broken-hearted if I Wasted."**

**"That does not mean I wish you dead."** He finds himself steadily growing angrier by Will's own lack of concern, and regretful of any part that he played in making Will think in such a way. *Doesn't he know how important he is? To Mischa? To me? How can he see so much, but not understand that?*

**"May I ask you a question?"** Will grunts, staring down at his hands. **"My aunt tells me that you were declared missing some years ago."** This has Will raising his gaze, if not his head, immediately. And again Hannibal has the novel experience of feeling almost like prey. **"How did you come to be in Lithuania? Were you procured, as she thinks? Or was it something else?"**

Whatever he was expecting, it is not the hard, flat laughter that bubbles out of Will's mouth. **"I honestly didn't expect anybody would look that hard."**

---

After their discussion in the library, with Will refusing to speak further, Hannibal leaves him in solitude to contemplate what he's uncovered. He fully intends to head downstairs to question Chiyoh and Mischa as they would be more aware of what Will has been enduring than his aunt, but he finds himself instead heading to the third floor, unable to resist the lure of Will's room.

He notices on the way that it appears more lived in than it had been during his previous stay - the obvious answer being that Chiyoh and Mischa have moved to that level of the townhouse as well.

Chiyoh must have naturally moved once she hit her first heat, but as Mischa was unpresented he imagined she got lonely staying on the second floor of the house all by herself. It made sense for her to change rooms in order to be closer to Will and Chiyoh.

He pushes open the door and is again met with the rather pitiful sight that is Will's room. It is *barren*. There is nothing of him there, no scattered books or clothes. Hannibal does not like the way that makes him feel, but that pales to what he finds when he opens the little door to Will's nest, curious if Will spent most of his time there instead. It would make sense, as Wasting omegas tended to withdraw themselves... but what he finds is... surprising. Shocking, even.

Instead of a plush, sunken bed lined with soft bedding, there's a simple mattress with a single sheet. All of the bedding that had been there before has disappeared entirely. The room smells like sweat and fear, and, like the rest of the house, Will cannot be felt here.

It's disquieting, to realize just how much Will has absented himself from the world. Almost like he is waiting to vanish.

*This is unacceptable. If he continues this way he will die and that is... unthinkable. I won't allow it.*

*He'll have to return with me to Florence. Anything else will be fatal.*

He dislikes the solution, thinking of the life he's built with such meticulous care. Though he's always maintained that there is a place for Will with him, it seems impossible to imagine Will there beside him, occupying the modest but well-appointed flat he'd rented out for the past two years. Harder still to see him thriving in the social world of the opera and art galas as Hannibal does. But what other course of action is there that will spare his life?

Hannibal hadn't meant for this to happen, but he's angry with himself for not considering the possibility of it, for not pursuing the line of reasoning to be *certain* his claiming had not harmed Will in this way. That he hadn't, that he'd blithely gone on, taking Murasaki's words at face value... it was not to be borne.

---

In the wake of Hannibal's absence, Will finds himself... confused. While he had anticipated a confrontation after the reveal of his current state, the brief flicker of horror on his face had been completely unexpected. He'd covered it immediately, filed it underneath a more appropriate mask, but Will had seen his fear, his *hurt*.

*And that pain was for me.*

"He will not let you die, Will." The voice reaches him from his place across the room, idly studying the leatherbound volumes no one really read. These days *his* Hannibal was more or less a constant presence, offering him the only comfort that he could stomach now. Today he's dressed almost casually, a soft red sweater paired with tailored slacks. It's deceptive.

Will only imagines the man as soft when he's feeling especially cornered or weak.

"You put me in prison. That doesn't say much." He sounds grumpy, and he *knows* it, but Hannibal only smiles at him, stepping closer until he's standing above Will.

"But I did not kill you, Will. I never really could." *A knife in my gut and a saw in my skull beg to fucking differ*, Will doesn't say. There's no need. Hannibal knows what he's thinking anyway, smooths a hand across his forehead, as though tracing the line from memory alone. Some days such idle affection stings, but today it's soothing. "You are worried what he will do, now that he is here and faced with your condition."

Shifting in his chair, Will knows his misery is written right on his face. There's no point in hiding it. *It's not like he's actually here, anyway. If he was he'd see it anyway. He always knew me.* "I can't know what he'll do."

"But you suspect." As always, Hannibal is unwilling to allow Will such self-deception. And he's right, while the younger version of Hannibal behaves in ways that are sometimes contrary to what he expects or knows, underneath, the bones of the man are the same. They

are structured the same, and based on that alone he can make a few predictions as to what this new Hannibal is going to do now that he feels uneasy.

An uncertain Hannibal is a dangerous thing. Judging by the gleam in his eyes, the way he runs his hand through Will's hair before stepping away, his Hannibal is thinking the same thing. "Right now I'm still a thing to him, and neither of you likes to see their possessions mistreated."

"He's seen something else in you, too, though I don't believe he has acknowledged that the feeling is fear."

"But he's not thinking about it. Not enough." *And Hannibal would rather be worried for my safety than consider the idea that I might not be in the palm of his hand.* "He's distracted."

Parsing out his own feelings isn't easy. Will knows he's angry, and hurt, but also happy because Hannibal was back, *finally*. They might be in the home stretch and it was time to switch to offense. To show Hannibal who he was, what he could do. What *they* could do, if only he could let go of his lingering feelings for Murasaki.

Hannibal's voice breaks in, rich and smooth. It always was. "You need to make him see then. He's already curious and feeling rather unmoored. Give him something to focus on."

Will turned to face him, questioning before it dawns on him. "So he doesn't freak out?"

"You know me too well, dear Will." His smile is pure praise, warming Will from the inside out. Sometimes he wonders if imagining Hannibal here is the only way he got through this. Other times, he knows it's true. *I need him, and he's always been there when I did. Even now, helping me plan a war against himself. I can't think of a better ally.*

"I need to think. I need... I can't be here with him."

With a frustrated groan, Will forces himself from the chair, leaving Hannibal behind. He needs to get out. It's like there's no air in the house, like Hannibal has taken it all for himself and Will can't *breathe*.

Chiyoh almost stops him in the hall, but chooses to let him pass without comment. Better than anyone, she understands his struggle. He wonders if she's headed upstairs to escape from the idea of Hannibal and Murasaki together again, wrapped up in one another, so tightly they saw nothing else.

Sometimes Will wants to ask what happened to Chiyoh, before she came here, that made her so afraid of losing Murasaki.

---

Mischa and Murasaki are downstairs, probably in the parlor - he can hear the piano - but he doesn't seek them out, grabbing his coat and yanking the front door shut behind him. Outside the air is warm, almost balmy, but he knows he'll be cold. These days he's rarely anything

but, shivering constantly. From what he's read, that's just another lovely aspect to Wasting - and the one he hates the most, if he's being honest. Sickness he can handle, but he feels like he's been abandoned to the cold and dark. Freezing.

He never liked being cold. It was associated with too many memories of being alone, of skipping meals because they were broke or his dad was absent. It's why he always kept the house in Wolf Trap warm. Cozy. *And now I'm never warm, no matter how many layers I wear.*

It's only mid-day, but there are still people out walking, enjoying the sun. All of them give Will a wide berth, as though Wasting is somehow catching, which just makes him want to growl at them. For that first year no one had really known. He'd gotten looks, some concerned and filled with compassion, but otherwise moved like a ghost through the streets of Paris. *They certainly know now.*

Ordinarily he'd choose to head to a park, or stay in the suburbs as he was unlikely to come across much foot traffic in the middle of the day, but instead he'd drawn towards the more commercial district, shops and restaurants. Towards the lights and sounds, as though surrounding himself with life would be enough to convince his body that he wasn't dying. That the world was still a great wide wonder, even with Hannibal... *no. I don't want to think about him being here. What it means, for all of us.*

*Of how important it is that I don't screw this up, and not just for me. Mischa, Chiyoh… even Murasaki. One wrong move and he'll destroy us all. He won't be able to help it. It's who he is, which is why I need to be better. I'm gambling with all of our lives.*

It's a sobering thought, but he presses forward. Off and on, he catches glances of his appearance in the reflection of store windows: the waxen skin, violet lazily smudged underneath his eyes that never seems to fade.

Finally he stops in front of a tailor's shop, *really* taking it in. The sunkenness of his eyes, the way his clothing hang off his frame. He looks dead. *All I need are milky eyes, crude black thread stitching up my chest.* A hollow laugh escapes his mouth, startling a woman walking past him. He resists the urge to growl at her, moving on instead, not wanting to draw more attention to himself.

After that he wanders, aimless and adrift, and somehow ends up in the huge, open gardens surrounding the Eiffel tower.

*Oh for fuck's sake.* "Feeling romantic, Will?" Like Hobbs, Hannibal isn't tied to basic rules. He appears when he chooses. Will gives him a sidelong look, annoyed. This time Hannibal is decked out in Full Peacock Attire, gleaming and bright in a full three piece suit. He wants to snap at him, but he's gotten better at not talking to him in public.

Hannibal seems like he's going to say something else as Will turns around to leave, but instead a hand falls on his shoulder. "Oh, *Will*." Something in his voice... Will turns around, wondering just what has Hannibal amused. What he *saw*.

There's a group of older teenage girls on the grass, laughing, playful and so impossibly light. They're all almost dressed for the wrong decade, peasant skirts and loose blouses that tie at the hollows of their throats. One of them has a guitar and is playing poorly while two of the others dance. But one of them, leaning back on a blanket on the grass...

"You've got to be fucking kidding me."

Without his permission his body lurches forward, he needs to be closer, to see if it's... *it can't be, can it?* Granted, he didn't know much, if anything, about where she'd come from before.

*Still, this seems like a bit much, right?* But no, closing the distance isn't resolving the tension in his shoulders, isn't changing those familiar features in to the face of a stranger. "Who knew our Bedelia was such a free spirit?"

Because it's *her*. Bedelia *fucking* du Maurier. Young and golden, stripped away of all the cool elegance she'd possessed by the time he'd met her in Baltimore. *This is the beginning of her.* He can see how much it's affecting her, that this moment became something important to the woman she would later become.

He can't help but choke a little, surprised by the intensity of it. He's gotten better at shielding himself from others, better than he'd ever been before... but this was someone he *knew*. From before.

Blue eyes suddenly turn to him, picking him out immediately, and then her long lean legs are bunching under her, carrying her to him. She moves differently, more fluid, less controlled. Her hair is still an icy blonde, but it's worn in a lazy, haphazard braid, and there's a daisy tucked just above her ear. **"Hello."**

Her voice is warm honey, and it's so jarring. All of it is. Because Will is at once consumed by sheer and utter loathing for this woman - *no, it's not her, this is just a girl* - but also... *Christ, is he really so lonely that he'd take THIS piece of his old life back?* He doesn't have much time to respond, because she's reaching out, offering her wrist. **"I'm Del."**

It's a very polite gesture, common to those raised in the upper East parts of the United States - an alpha offering their wrist to an omega as a way to show they mean no harm. It gives her away, but she doesn't know what she needs to be on guard with him. She has no fucking *idea* of how agitated he is right now, what a danger he is to her.

And that isn't fair.

He knows it, he *does*. "Don't be rude, Will." Hannibal is practically choking with pleasure at this confrontation. Because he sees it too - Bedelia, Del... her bright eyes have seen something in Will. Something dark. Something *dangerous*. And she's curious about it.

It reminds him of how she interacted with Hannibal - the old one, the original. She had been afraid of him, but her fascination often over-rode her self-preservation. Like now. He can see her thoughts practically latching on to him. It's what brought her over, away from the circle of her friends.

Finally, Will takes her wrist, brings it to his nose and scents it like she's expecting. **"Will."**

**"Will."** She rolls the word around on her tongue, not hiding her accent. If Will had to guess, he'd say she was from Boston. **"You look a little lost, Will. First time in Paris?"**

**"No."**

Del smiles, sharp and pleased. She already likes him, thinks he is clever and strange. *A puzzle for her to enjoy. She's been so bored. Paris is beautiful, and it feels in a way like she's finally home after so many years struggling just to be accepted by her wealthy peers, but they're so shallow. Vapid. All they care about is fucking hot men (or women) and getting drunk in small shitholes. For them, this is a chance to be a little wild before they have to go home, to college and expectations and boring, staid little lives that are waiting got them at home.*

*For her, it was an out. An escape.*

**"It's mine."** She shrugs, shifting her weight before leaning down, hands on her knees, giving him an almost unimpeded view down her loose blouse if he were so inclined. (He's not.)

Bedelia had always been tall for a woman, but Del wasn't fully grown just yet. Unfortunately, Will wasn't either. He was a good foot shorter than her. **"But something tells me you know that, little omega."**

**"Watch it, *Del*."** He practically snarls it at her. At his side, Hannibal might as well be laughing. He'd always liked to watch them spar.

Del is unrepentant, grinning before she tweaked his fucking nose. **"Where's the fun in that, Will?"** This time he does growl, stepping away from her and rubbing at the place she'd touched with annoyance. He doesn't quite know what to do with this version of Bedelia. She's so... she's nothing like her future self. *But at the same time, it's there, in the way she watches me. Like she knows exactly what I am.*

He doesn't like it, and worse... he *hates* that he's already thinking about what he can do to use this to his advantage. To advance the war. *Killing her would be pointless. This isn't Bedelia. She wouldn't understand why. It would feel empty. But she's an alpha, and Hannibal is possessive enough to not like the idea of me having a friend outside of our strange little household. Especially not one like her.*

*Still*. It's only sporting to warn her, pulling his collar side to show the ridge of scarline on his neck. It healed as much as he expected, giving him the appearance of having been mauled. But Del, her smile takes on a Cheshire edge and she runs a finger along the edge of it. **"Oh, excellent."**

*Well. I did warn her, right?*

Will smiles, a ghoulish thing. **"Take me to lunch?"**

---

At the beginning of the summer, Will's nest is an empty thing, bereft of any small comfort. It's clearly unused. But Hannibal quickly takes it upon himself to change that, arranging for new bedding to be delivered to the house, picking everything out himself, with more care than he expected to feel. He wanted it to be *right*, for Will to be comfortable there.

He'd done a lot of reading since Will's illness had been revealed to him, but there was distressingly little to go on. Wasting was seen almost as a fairly modern phenomena, a condition largely unnamed until the first world war. It was the first time omegas hadn't gone to war with their partners, Victorian sensibilities all but claiming that they were too frail and weak for such a thing. The result was initially viewed as a plague of some kind, but study had revealed the truth: the separation from their partners was killing them.

Not that it had reversed opinions. If anything, it strengthened the idea that omegas were weak, and helpless. *Laughable, at best.*

But he'd found a decent amount of information in regards to helping a Wasting omega recover, and he was implementing everything he could. Reassurance was key. *A wasting omega needs the close company of their mate. They must feel safe and secure in their position, must know that they have not been abandoned. Because they are weakened, spending time nesting together is an excellent way to mend the damaged pair bond.*

And so, he started to insist that Will use his nest. Asking that he spend time in the too small room for several hours each day... when Will could be collared and cornered into it, anyway. He'd begun spending more and more time outside of the house, and when he returned his scent was dulled, almost impossible to detect, somehow. As though he'd hidden it.

There were several forms of scent dampeners on the market, but few were very effective. *Yet how else is he managing it? Where is he going? And just what is it that he's hiding?*

---

Hannibal pushes Will to nest, and he hates it. Begrudgingly if Hannibal catches him before he sneaks out of the house he'll go in, but he spends his time in there doing situps and pushups, basic strength training. It passes the time and it keeps him sharp, carving what little body fat he has away.

*Not that I expect he'll let me get away with this forever.* So far the things Hannibal had purchased for him were shoved in to the corner, untouched. Thinking about it only made his head hurt. Instead, he thought about the future. About Del and Murasaki, chess pieces in his hand that he had to decide how to best play.

He spent a lot of time with Del these days, mostly to annoy Hannibal, but also because he found her presence soothing, in a way. She was interesting, and she *saw* him.

They went everywhere, more or less, and got into trouble more often than not, sneaking in to places they shouldn't. It was nice to have that distraction and, before he came home, he'd

cover his scent carefully with a homemade recipe.

In his time, scent blockers were readily available, but that was years away so he made do - knowing the base components to them gave him an advantage. Aloe vera was by far the most effective at neutralizing all scent - both his and Del's - which meant Hannibal didn't know where he'd been or who he'd been with. It was also easy to get ahold of.

And didn't *that* frustrate Hannibal, that unknown variable, pride preventing him from asking outright how Will was accomplishing it.

He had tried, at first subtly, to discover where Will went in the afternoons. But Will only baited him. Offered more questions instead of answers, dancing around Hannibal in a way that made his hallucination of the man so very pleased and proud.

Of course Hannibal breaks, eventually. This morning he'd practically frog-marched Will to his nest, sitting in the doorway with his arms crossed. "You Will build your nest, Will." He wants to roll his eyes at the demand, or to shout at him, because despite Hannibal's renewed presence Will is still deteriorating and it makes him angry, that he can't see *why*.

*There's no comfort in nesting. Not alone.*

"Fine, you want me in here so damn bad? It's that goddamn important?" He's angry. That's his only excuse for what he does next: grabbing Hannibal's arm and dragging him to the mattress. He'd followed, more out of surprise and bemusement than anything, but Will didn't care why he'd gone along with it. *I'm so tired. I just want him to fucking hold me while I sleep.*

It's unheard of, he knows. Omegas are known for being territorial about their nests. They don't allow others inside them except for their heats, aside from their children. They are solitary creatures. But Hannibal carved that part of Will out in his kitchen, had buried himself so deeply in Will's psyche that he could find no relief in solitude. *Not anymore.* He refuses to be in his nest without him.

Quickly, he drags a few things from their boxes, tossing them on the mattress lazily before curling up against Hannibal's side. "Just hold me and shut up."

At his other side, he can feel the other Hannibal against his back, covering him. He's surrounded, and it's the first real peace he's felt in years.

---

They've begun to spend more time together. Ostensibly, it is part of Will's treatment plan, the most effective way to cure his Wasting. To heal him. But it troubles her, seeing them bent together over a book, arguing semantics. Or walking in the garden, Will provoking and Hannibal laughing. She knows it is the worst sort of cruelty to hope that it does not succeed. That Hannibal finds himself bored with the obligation of it. But so far, he seems content.

The beginning of the summer had been rocky. Murasaki knows - and *hates* herself for it - that

she had been relieved. Will had spent long hours away from the house, a reversal of his tendency to spend all his time in the library with Mischa. He'd hardly left the house at all, before Hannibal's arrival, but it had sparked something in him, a flight response perhaps. And when he'd returned, he was concealed behind some sort of scent masker.

Hannibal had been *furious*.

She'd quietly watched from a distance, keeping Mischa and Chiyoh out of the line of fire, as the two men had squared up against one another. Just as she watched when the blonde alpha had shown up at their home in the early hours of the morning, throwing rocks at Will's window and whisper-shouting about a lake.

She still didn't know if she should tell Hannibal of the girl, who was most certainly an alpha. It might make him angry, might cut away their newfound closeness, but when he was angry Hannibal could be... unpredictable. He just as easily could destroy them all in his rage.

So she chose silence, her preferred weapon, finding ways to be near him when she could. It was harder now that Will was spending time at home. Even her beloved Chiyoh seemed to betray her, helping Mischa occupy Hannibal during the few times Will could not be found. *I know she worries that he will ruin me, but so help me, I cannot stay away. I need him. I need his affection, his admiration. Every day I feel like I am fading. A ghost of what he once saw in me. And who am I, if not that woman?*

*And what will become of me, if Hannibal decides I am of no use to him?*

*There's still time. I can still prove myself, somehow. Surely it's not too late?*

---

There's been another killing. Hannibal can see it on the front page as he bends to retrieve the paper from the stoop - bright and garish, the headline may as well be screaming. He had noticed the first one while he was in Florence, captivated by the artistry of the description and wishing that the paper had been able to obtain photos of the scene. It sounded exquisite, like a veritable masterpiece that only he could really appreciate for what he was.

When he'd made the decision to go home, idly Hannibal had wondered if he might meet the artist responsible.

If he's correct, this is the fifth such murder, though the police don't seem to have connected all of cases. They can't grasp how any one person could be responsible for such beauty and horror, their minds are too small. This one, though, was tied to the first, the reporter giving all of the lurid details that she was able to obtain - some of them exaggerated for maximum effect.

*There are no suspects. It's hard to imagine that anyone could be responsible for such a crime, for turning our city into a slaughterhouse. The police say they have several leads, but how is it possible that such a man has not been caught? Even now, he hides among us, a hungry wolf. Eager to rend the city apart in his teeth.*

There is inspiration in that idea, so much so that Hannibal cannot help himself. He lets himself indulge in a kill, really throws himself in to the art. What he makes is... he almost cannot imagine it's possible. It is *glorious*, a worthless beta who had cut Hannibal off last week, turned into something worthy of the old masters, a mirror image of St Sebastien set up in a vast square, eyes up to God.

---

When the police discover it, the body is quickly added to the first two, and there's something... satisfying in that. *It's the first sounder.* He likes the idea of it, of them creating together even now. When he asks Del about it she only gives him her toothy smile, laughing before asking him if he wants to go to the museum. **"They have some beautiful pictures of St. Sebastien, after all. Maybe you'll be inspired?"**

---

August comes and goes, with no sign of Will's heat - or the killer Hannibal had hoped to lure out. He wonders if Wasting has an effect on heat cycles, but knowing Will... it's something else. Something *more*. Another layer to the game they play that Hannibal hasn't discovered just yet. *But I will. He may dance just out of my grasp, but I am determined to know the whole of him. Every secret, every hurt. Everything.*

He finds himself missing Florence, more than ready to be home. Especially if it means getting Will away from *her*. Murasaki had finally pulled him aside to voice her concerns, and the white-hot anger he'd felt upon learning just who Will had been with towards the beginning of the summer - and sometimes even now - had faded, somewhat.

Knowing that she'd deliberately kept the knowledge from him had drawn his ire in a greater way, strangely. He could accept that Will had found comfort and friendship elsewhere, even if it grated, but Murasaki continued to prove that she would be a player in the game first before she would be a partner.

*Will might not tell me everything, but he'd never hide something so important. Not unless he had to.* "Murasaki tells me that you have a companion. A rude girl who throws stones at your window."

That he expected denial says something of him that Hannibal does not wish to confront, but he's relieved when Will throws his head back and laughs - a full body sound that has him falling against the bed. It's early morning and they'd fallen asleep in Will's nest, only for Hannibal to be drawn out by his aunt and her terrified concern. *He's been sneaking off at all hours, Hannibal. Forgive me, I only wanted to protect him. But she's an alpha, and...* Hannibal had re-entered Will's domain furious.

And just as quickly, was disarmed by a half-smile and blue eyes sparkling with amusement.

"Good morning to you too, Hannibal." Languidly stretching, arms above his head, Will seems utterly unconcerned. *He hides many things, but this he offers freely. Whatever Murasaki*

*thought, she was clearly mistaken. Still.*

"Do you deny it?" That he sounds jealous is aggravating, but he cannot help it. The idea of anyone... *he did not like it*, and his irritation showed. Enough that Will softened towards him, offering a hand, which Hannibal took as he crawled back on the the mattress with him until they sat side by side, shoulders touching.

Despite his gentle tone, there was a firmness to his next words. "No. I'm allowed to have friends, and Del is one of them."

"A friend."

Another laugh, Will nudging at Hannibal with his shoulder. It's the most carefree he's seen him in a long time. "Honestly, Del would probably eat me alive for the fun of it. She's not my type anyway."

"Murasaki feels that it is more." Though he does not wish to be placated, Hannibal knows that he believes Will without reservation. That he *wants* to believe him. *Strange to think that I have faith in this winsome creature, that I have faith in anything at all. I have always trusted in his loyalty, but this is new. More.*

As though he can see Hannibal's inner confusion building, and because he is Will and cannot resist the barb, his next words are designed to wound, if only shallowly. "But she's only telling you now. I've known Del for months." *Yes, she is.* And that was the crux of it. Murasaki was trying to defend her position and was getting increasingly desperate. Hannibal had seen it, the growing fear in her eyes, the way she grasped at ways to get him alone. *Now she is trying to drive a wedge between Will and I. It begs the question: what else isn't she telling me?*

A soft hand on his arm pulls Hannibal back to the present. "Del isn't even here. She's an American and had to go back home, only last minute she married some little omega lord and they're on their honeymoon in Italy. Poor bastard doesn't know what he got himself in to."

It is enough to dispel all doubt, and Hannibal almost feels foolish for the concern. *If Will had chosen to find a mate, he wouldn't hide it from me. He'd throw it in my face. It's not in his nature to be part of something so sordid. He is too honest for that.* He feels compelled to apologize, but refuses on principle. Instead he attempts to deflect. "I would not presume to tell you who you can and cannot befriend, Will."

"Bullshit." He's smiling again, teasing.

Hannibal's chest feels tight. "I want you to be happy." The words are barely said, but they feel truer than any other words he's spoken before. He knows that this is a moment he will remember forever, in the mind palace he was slowly constructing in his head. He wanted to keep it forever, to remember the way Will was looking at him, torn between a hundred different feelings, his bare *yearning*.

Finally, he speaks. The words equally quiet, respecting the sacred quiet that has sprung up

around them.

"I'm trying to be."

Chapter End Notes

I know, this Bedelia is NOT the one we know. Because we don't have her history, I just rolled with it. I like the idea of her having a similar background to Will - something that she'd have hated, because it reminded her of her own past, a past that she worked hard to rid herself of. He would remind her of what she'd lost in the process.

Also I'm sorry if having Hallucination Hannibal and Baby Not-Quite-A-Teenager Hannibal both around is confusing. I did my best to make it clear which was which.

# Florence Beckons

Chapter Notes

Italics - Lithuanian
Normal Text - English
BOLD - French (both Fancy and Bastardized)

Holy crap, getting back in to the swing of things was harder than anticipated! I literally had to drag this out kicking and screaming, and I'm not satisfied with it at all.

Fair warning, there's some brief mentions of infanticide. Not Will OR Hannibal. Wanted to mention it here just in case. It's during the dinner with Bedelia if you'd rather skip it.

The cake is custom made: a lush red velvet with cream cheese frosting, done up in three tiers and beautifully presented with edible glitter and snowflakes befitting the odd winter wonderland that Hannibal had cultivated for the occasion - Mischa might have been his little summer lass, but she had a love of the winter and there seemed no better theme for her birthday than that. It's why the dining room had been turned in to a veritable snowy forest, delicately bedecked in white and soft, rich greens, as the four of them sang around the table, waiting for the birthday girl to make a wish.

Mischa's eyes seemed especially bright when lit up by the sparklers Hannibal had chosen in lieu of candles, darting around, so pleased and grateful to be surrounded by all of her favorite people that she could hardly contain her own happiness. It was how Hannibal liked her best, content and boiling over with happiness, and one shared look with Will confirmed he felt the same.

Hannibal could admit that the concept of family was still something he struggled to accommodate within himself. Often he found it horribly nostalgic and cloying, but there were moments he could understand the appeal - such as now, watching Mischa lean forward in eagerness to blow as hard as she could, plunging them all into a temporary darkness with a laugh.

In that brief moment Will's hand reached out to his own, squeezing once before releasing him just as Murasaki flicked the lights back on. Such a small gesture, hardly a handful of seconds, yet Hannibal found himself wishing that it had lasted. That Will hadn't pulled away once the light had threatened to reveal them.

So much of their contact came only in the darkness, or when they were alone. Will was so very mindful of the others, aware of them in a way that was both frustrating and endearing. He never allowed himself to forget the potential of their strange, uneasy courtship - how quickly it could turn to violence - and he didn't seem willing to risk anything more than quick

touches and looks when in the company of the others. Even privately, Will was always so self-contained, the opposite of what a typical omega should be.

But then again, Hannibal knew better than that. There was no 'typical' omega, and he had the proof of it here in this room, surrounding him.

Yet Will's determination to hold himself separate only seemed to call to the animal within him, luring him closer by simply being so cautious. No one else seemed to be so fully aware of Hannibal's capabilities while simultaneously unafraid of them. Will's hesitation wasn't born of terror, like Murasaki's was. No, for Will it was something else, and until he was certain of Hannibal's intentions he'd likely not allow himself to give in.

*Wise boy.*

Strange, the tableaux they made now, suddenly awash with light, the picture of domestic: Mischa still smiling, caught red-handed running her finger through the icing while Chiyoh was half-stood already, clearly intent on grabbing plates. Murasaki was apart from them all, solemn and isolated near the doorway, watching with a strange blend of envy and pride. Will was beside him - always beside him - and glowing with satisfaction. Where did that leave him?

Hannibal pictured it in his mind, standing beside Mischa, one hand on her chair. He would look fond, pleased with her pleasure in his offerings. But would he be happy? Would the monster within be lurking just there, in the corner of his eyes? Even now he felt the itch. The craving that had only grown since he'd chosen to release his urges upon the world. To mold it in a way that it deserved. Since he'd come to Paris there hadn't been time, aside from the one impulsive kill he'd used to attempt to draw out the Painter of Paris.

*Such a mild-mannered name for such a bloody little artist.*

There had been no death from that quarter either, an unusual thing. Hannibal had expected at least one grand display to round out the summer, but there'd been nothing. Only silence. A preternatural stillness that would disturb him, should he allow it. Never did his mind connect the two occurrences - he wasn't ready to. (And Will knew that, carefully steered him away from the discovery, a contrast to their old, lost lives.)

In short, they had found peace. It was a precarious one, constantly threatening to topple over, but for now they had it within their grasp.

*"What did you wish for, sweet girl?"*

Mischa is quiet, weighing the magic of wishing alongside her own impossible need to share, before she motions for Hannibal to bend down. And then she whispers in his ear: *"I'm eleven Hannibal! I wished for everything."*

---

The summer has been an idyll of serenity, the citizens of Paris unknowing of just how lucky

this brief refrain has been for them. An endless sort of syrupy calm, golden and mellow, in which two equals study the ground and halt the war. But it has to end eventually. Florence beckons Hannibal, and in turn Hannibal beckons Will, offers him sanctuary and shelter, a prize so hard won... yet Will finds himself hesitating, and Hannibal does not understand the cause until the morning of their departure when Will is buried so tightly in the arms of Mischa and Chiyoh.

His unblooded sisters, how they beat in his heart.

**"Promise you'll write Will? And more than a few short words!"**

**"I promise, little knight valiant."** He taps at her nose with affection, but his voice is tearing. Threatening to give entirely. Mischa is no better, her dark eyes halfway to tears.

Chiyoh seems a stoic figure beside them, holding her vigil, but Hannibal can see the tension in her frame, the fear. She is rife with it.

As is the one person not included in the rather touching scene: Murasaki. She has taken care to present herself beautifully today, turned out in one of the kimonos she favors now, something from a dynasty long past. A token of something she has no words for. She has eyes only for Hannibal, selfishly drinking in these final minutes as though she may never see him again. Desperate for him, afraid of him, and above all loving him so deeply that it's breaking her to do this, to release him with Will, knowing and seeing how well matched they are. *It's a pity that she's allowed her longing to be trapped so neatly behind convention.*

Will tilts his head, drags Chiyoh into a bearhug, tight but gentle. **"I'll write to you too, Chiyoh. You know I will."**

The girl only sniffs, haughty and clinging to aloof dignity with all her might. **"We'll do well enough without you, Will Graham."** Yet she clung to him just as tightly as he did to her, and Hannibal felt... he didn't really know. Displeased, perhaps? He did not like to see them hurting, struggling to be brave in the face of their parting. It was for the best - he couldn't possibly take them all back to Florence, Will seemed impossible enough - but that did not mean he liked witnessing the feelings his decision evoked. It was upsetting, if he'd allow it to be.

He chose to be annoyed, instead. It was a safer emotion.

**"Come now, he isn't going to vanish in to the abyss. Florence isn't so far as that."**

Though Will was not facing him, and he couldn't be *certain*, Hannibal was nevertheless positive that the frustrating boy was rolling his eyes at Hannibal's haughty tone. It was all but confirmed when Mischa giggled and Chiyoh gave one of her rare smiles. *Brat.*

Finally, Will stood, stepping back from the girls and finally facing Hannibal - and the future - for the first time since he'd come down the stairs. Though his eyes were wet, and startlingly lovely, he managed to convey a cautious sort of optimism. A hope that this really was for the best. *How strange to think that he has such faith in me. Stranger still that I want to prove him*

*right.*

All but forgotten, Murasaki bids them adieu from the doorway. But Hannibal doesn't hear her soft goodbye. He's too focused on Will, a stark contrast to the wan, hollow creature he'd seen all those weeks before, his skin still pale but flush with health. **"Are you ready, Will?"**

**"As ready as I can be."**

---

Hannibal can almost feel it, the second they re-enter Florence. They traveled by train, Will's aversion to airplanes apparent despite him never speaking of it, and he spent most of the time reading while Will stared out the window, watching everything but seeing nothing. His mind seemed troubled, the further they got from Paris, but Hannibal was confident that his sorrow would abate with time. Especially once he was able to see Florence, to embrace it as Hannibal had.

When they arrived Hannibal was surprised that Will seemed almost passingly familiar with their surroundings - as though he'd been there before, if only briefly. But when pressed naturally Will had only sarcasm in response. **"Of course I've been here, didn't you know?"** Sometimes, though, Hannibal wasn't quite certain Will was being sarcastic. He was such an enigma most days it was difficult to discern what was boldly offered truth or a carefully constructed lie.

Today, he decided to drop the subject of Will's possible travels - it was easy to do, once they'd unpacked and Will asked him to show him Florence. **"Properly, I mean. I want to see what you see."** Will was always the most disarming when he was being forthright, and it was no surprise that Hannibal found himself showing Will the city he'd grown to love, pointing out the galleries and restaurants, taking a cab to drive past his school.

Will soaked it all in, equal parts delighted and pleased by everything they encountered. In turn, Hannibal was enthralled by this side of Will. He seemed so unencumbered by the doubts and worries that had plagued him almost since that first meeting. The picture of youth and, admittedly, beauty. Hannibal did not miss the many eyes that trailed after Will as he carelessly weaved through crowds, pointing out the things that interested him.

He may as well have been a gleaming light, demanding the notice of those who were lucky enough to spot him.

Those admiring looks immediately veered away the moment Hannibal was spotted, something the infuriating boy found amusing. **"Oh my god Hannibal, do you really need to be the big bad wolf right now? Nobody is even paying attention to us. Come on, I want to go over there. What is it anyway, a park?"**

With little resistance, Hannibal is tugged towards what is indeed a park, sprawling along the edges of the city. They've walked much further than he realized but Will seems energized by it all, more so when he realizes that there are *dogs* in the park. *Oh for heaven's sake...* **"Will, really, you'll ruin your pants."**

Undaunted by Hannibal's stern tone, Will continues to kneel in the grass, surrounded by his furry admirers. There must be at least twelve dogs vying for his attention, licking his face and hands, whining until he scratches their bellies and ears. Until now Hannibal hadn't really witnessed Will's rather charming love of canines for himself, though Mischa had written of it often enough. Before Robert's death, Mischa had asked if Hannibal might convince the man to allow them to have a pet, but nothing ever came of it. Hannibal disliked the idea of a messy creature getting hair on his clothes and ruining his shoes, but Will was incandescent in this moment, gone from a light to a burning star, and it made him reconsider his opinions on the matter.

*Perhaps a small one. Something manageable. That wouldn't be so terrible...*

---

Though he'd rather not, Hannibal knows that this informal dinner is important to Will and he should attempt to be friendly with the woman they are going to meet. Bedelia de Maurier. *Del*. Since her existence was made known to him, Will has had no qualms talking about his only real friend outside of Mischa and Chiyoh, and with each new revelation Hannibal knows there are a dozen more Will is keeping to himself.

*She's got a wicked sense of humor, sharp as hell.*

*Can we get white wine instead? That's Del's favorite.*

*Del said, Del this, Del that...* if Hannibal were a weaker man, he'd have been driven to drink by now, and the feeling only intensifies when he meets the esteemed woman herself, slinking in to their living room as though she belongs there.

As though she has more right to Will's presence than Hannibal does, wrapping him in a warm hug without regards to propriety.

It gives him time to study this illusive creature, this woman who he believes tried her best to win over Will, mark be damned. She's pretty enough, he supposes. Cameo face, icy blonde hair that's currently pulled into a sleek ponytail, pale blue eyes. She's dressed much nicer than he expected, in a designer gown that isn't a knockoff - no doubt a boon of her new marriage to a wealthy fool.

Said fool is standing awkwardly in the hallway with wine, his eyes on the ground. Utterly meek as his mate coos over Will, praising the smart new suit Hannibal had had made for him shortly after their arrival. **"Good enough to eat, little Will."** Her small is sharp.

He *loathes* her.

Will laughs, rolling his eyes and pulling back enough to offer his hand out to the unknown figure in the room, wanting to be polite but clearly curious about the man Del decided to marry. He's speculated enough about him, and Hannibal wonders if he feels vindicated in being right. **"I don't believe Del has told me your name, she's awful that way."**

**"My name is Louis, Louis du Maurier."** He's much too sweet, this omega of hers, with a voice soaked in honey. Soft in all the right ways though there is something in him that speaks of perhaps having some sort of spine. From what Hannibal has been told, Louis is 25, much older than his alpha bride, and the sole heir of his father's fortune, with no one left alive to manage it for him.

It meant that he'd been in a very unique position, once upon a time, one that his marriage has taken from him rather neatly, though Will has already told him that Del hasn't taken away her omega's rights to his company. *Why would she? He's run the business for years, and it's very profitable. It means she can enjoy the privilege of wealth with none of the work and look magnanimous in doing so.* He's applaud her enterprise if he didn't find it so very pedestrian.

**"It's nice to meet you, Louis. I'm Will and this is Hannibal."** Unlike Bedelia - *Del* - Hannibal politely offers his wrist for Louis to scent but otherwise makes no attempt to touch him.

Louis is practically beaming, all hazel eyes and brown curls so dark they might as well be black. He bears a passing resemblance to Will, something they both have noticed - Will with confused amusement, Hannibal with irritation. **"Thank you, it's, it's a pleasure. Bedelia has told me so much about you."**

**"Bedelia is it?"** One eyebrow quirks up, glancing at Del, and the two share a look that seems to exclude both Hannibal and Louis. It's discomforting, but Hannibal is determined not to let their closeness affect him. He is not that kind of alpha and it is beneath him to even consider behaving like one. Instead he offers his arm to Louis and the four of them make their way to the dining room, with Will mockingly offering Del his arm in parody.

**"It's a perfectly respectable name."** Bedelia raises her head, haughty and too proud, but the look is ruined by Will's barking laugh.

**"Which is why it doesn't suit you at all, Del. You're too much of a scoundrel."** He nudges her in the ribs, even as he pulls out her chair. Technically, as an alpha she should have been the one to help seat Will, but they're among friends and neither of them seems inclined to act according to convention - something Hannibal is almost grateful for, given the bubbling feelings of possession threatening to make him do something unseemly.

For his part Will seems unconcerned with Hannibal, his attention focused now on retrieving their meal from the kitchen, which connects to the dining room with a lovely open arch. Bedelia calls after him, playfully. **"Hush, you're making me look terrible! What must your mate think, hmmm?"** With that, her pale gaze turns to Hannibal, and whatever she sees she clearly finds him wanting in some way, as her eyes narrow and her lip curls up in a sneer before she smooths the expression from her face.

**"I think you are charming, though unconventional."** There's a subtle hint of challenge in his voice, but it's an edge that she catches as he intended. Had Will not been preoccupied with their meal - something he had laboriously created for the past few days, much to Hannibal's amazement - no doubt he'd have been frowning at the tone.

**"You're older than I thought."** *And you are impudent and more brazen than I expected.* **"Then again, traditionalists always go for the young ones, don't they?"** Hannibal doesn't dignify that with a response, choosing to instead help Louis to his seat and taking the offered wine from his delicate hands. He most certainly does not think about cracking the bottle across her skull, seeing if the red of her blood contrasted nicely with the pinot noir she's brought along. **"Honestly, you must have snatched him out of the cradle."**

Fortunately, Will enters in time to hear that remark, and he frowns grumpily at her even as he places a beautiful platter of roast lamb on the table. **"Del! Hannibal did no such thing."**

**"Of course not, I'm only teasing."** She isn't at all sorry for the remark, and it shows as she watches Hannibal take his own seat next to Louis. But she surprises him with her next words, reminding him again of the thought he'd first had upon seeing Will after they'd been parted for two years: *Will is a savage creature. He's dangerous.* **"As though you'd have let him."**

**"Will never mentioned you were such a high-spirited companion."** *Or so very rude.*

---

So far, dinner isn't going that great. It started with Del's attitude the moment she came into their apartment. Almost like she was spoiling for a fight and determined to offend. It never boded well when she got in one of those moods, but Will knew how to deflect her for the most part. Only she wasn't just annoyed in general, being a shit because it pleased her to be difficult... no, this evening she had a target: Hannibal.

Even as they were sitting down, Will plating everything in a way that would have made the old Hannibal *almost* happy, she was on the attack. **"That's funny, Will didn't mention you at all."** *That was rather catty, even for Del. She sounds more like Bedelia when she-* It hits Will then, with alarming clarity, that she's treating Hannibal *exactly* like she treated him before, in his original timeline. *Oh my god. Have we... have we switched? Am I Del's Hannibal?* At times like this, he greatly wished he had someone from before that could appreciate the beautiful, fucked up irony of his current life.

Of course they'd probably be horrified by all the death and murder, so maybe it was better that he didn't have anybody to share with?

Still. He wanted this evening to go well. He'd spent all damn week making sure he got the food right, even if nobody could understand *why* it was so important but him. Sacrificial lamb, with all the trimmings. It seemed fitting. So many people had tried to sacrifice Will for the greater good - or just their own good - over the years, and here he was, feeding lamb to the woman who, in another lifetime, tried to end him out of a selfish desire to be the only one keeping Hannibal's confidence.

One who in *this* life had apparently switched teams.

*Oh god, the other Bedelia would be horrified. Fucking horrified.* Not only at her younger self being in league with Will Graham, but at Will having such an unimpeded insight in to her

life. She'd always been so careful to hide away, to keep her life mysterious and vague. Even Hannibal hadn't had the whole of her history and Will knew she'd felt smug about that.

There were no more secrets to her now. Will could see everything. The slow, subtle ways she was changing herself. Adapting to become the woman she'd always wanted to be, ever since she'd been a little girl, cold and hungry and *wanting*. He could see her becoming Bedelia, discarding the girl she'd been because she refused to be anyone's fool and the idea of anyone laughing at her was unacceptable. In a few years he could see how polished she would be, how refined and elegant.

Then, of course, there was Louis. The husband she'd never spoken of, not once. It was clear he was infatuated with her, that she was different from anyone he'd ever known and that's what had won him over, knocked over the defenses he'd built for years as an omega running a shipping empire in an alpha's world. Only now she was changing, becoming something else, and he didn't know what to do. He didn't understand that it was the money she had been hungry for, not him. Will wondered how long it would take him to realize it.

He wondered too just how many children they lost.

Bedelia had only spoken of children once, and she'd done so with contempt. With her dislike of the weak, he could see her creeping in to a nursery. See the silk pillow in her hand. He saw just as easily drugs slipped into food, miscarriages cruelly induced until it broke her mate and he ended up taking his own life. That, at least, had been public knowledge, though she'd done what she could to minimize the coverage.

Swallowing hard, Will sat and turned to Louis, intent on changing the subject before Hannibal and Del got any more aggressive or obvious about their barbs. **"Tell me more about yourself, Louis."**

**"Oh, well, I guess there's not much to tell."** God help him, he *blushed*. *Where did Del even find him? I know this kind of innocence doesn't appeal to her at all. It never has.* Across from him, as though to prove his point, Del's nostrils briefly flared in annoyance, which in turn made Hannibal smile.

*This is trainwreck*. **"Del says you run your father's business?"**

**"Yes, he passed away several years ago, and his will left me in charge, with my uncle to act as my guardian, but my uncle unfortunately died in the same crash, so I had to run things by myself."** Louis isn't a bad guy. Out from under Del's influence he was probably self-assured and confident, but she'd already started tearing him down. Will could see that. Bit by bit, she was taking away whatever small things she had likely been attracted to in the first place, though to her credit he didn't think she was doing it on purpose. She wasn't like Hannibal, remaking people at a whim.

It was more like she was ferreting out the weakness in him, and he had no defenses built up against that kind of attack. Didn't think he'd need it with his mate. *Christ, I almost feel bad for him. At least when Hannibal fucked with my head, he had a purpose. A goal. Del just can't help herself.* **"Del said you've done very well, it's some sort of shipping company?"**

---

"She married that poor man for the money." It's later in the evening, after their guests have made their way home. Will can't say he's sorry to see Del gone, already mourning her because he knows without intervention that she's going to become the Bedelia he knew, and it's a pity, and a *waste*, because the bright, mischievous girl he'd befriended over the summer was infinitely more interesting than the cold harpy she'd become. Then again, he could admit to being biased. He'd never really liked Bedelia.

Still, he defends her now, on the hope that something can be done. "Of course she did." He's fiddling with the stupid cufflinks on his shirt, the fancy kind that are far more complicated than they need to be but Hannibal apparently *LIVES* for them. On the other side of the room, Hannibal is likewise removing his own suit, but he's stopped now, surprised by Will's calm acceptance of Del's rather mercenary actions.

"You've never been poor, Hannibal. You don't know what it's like. What it can do to a person. You shouldn't judge her for what she's done to survive." He doesn't have to say: *I've been poor too. And I was just as tempted to do what Del did, but my options were limited, and there was a lot to lose for me. Del just stood to gain.*

Hannibal tilts his head slightly, thoughtful. "You don't think it's cruel of her, to marry someone she does not love?"

"I'd think you of all people would appreciate cruelty." *You're one of the cruelest people I know, after all. But you're so good at it I can't even be mad.* Will shrugs, as though it's of no consequence either way, before he starts to smirk - an *awful* thought occurring to him. "Admit it, you just don't like that you couldn't charm her."

Predictably Hannibal stiffens, offended by the idea. "I had no inclination to do so."

"Because you knew it was pointless and don't waste time." Snickering, but trying not to because Hannibal is like a wet cat when he gets pissy and Will is not in the mood to deal with him, he slides in to bed and waits until Hannibal joins him. So far they haven't really pushed their boundaries since the move, settling in to a routine of sorts that had Will slowly moving in to Hannibal's room. But they aren't talking about it.

In the soft light from the moon, he turns over to regard the man he loves, despite it all, and regrets that he's going to have to push at the lines of their relationship when all he wants to do is sleep. But if it isn't said then Hannibal might do something rash, and he doesn't want that. Not when Del is relatively blameless in the life they have now, and it would be bitter to deal with her loss. "Hannibal. I will be very disappointed if anything happens to Del."

"Why should anything happen to her?" Again, Hannibal is frozen, though it's hard to say what he's feeling with his face cast in shadow - if he had to guess, Will would say he's surprised him again, alluding to his nocturnal activities without actually naming them outright. And Hannibal doesn't know how to take that, which will probably keep him up all night, wondering just what it is that Will knows. And *how* he knows it.

"No reason. Good night, Hannibal."

# Taken Root

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry this is short. I have a beastly migraine and staring at the screen is making it worse, so I couldn't finish the second half of this, but I wanted to make sure I posted something for ya'll.

Italics - Lithuanian
Normal Text - English
BOLD - French (both Fancy and Bastardized)
Underlined - Italian

Hopefully I don't have to add another language to this clusterfuck.

"Mr. Lecter?"

It had to happen eventually, somebody catching on. Hannibal had a persona to live up to after all, as the Monster of Florence, and he'd staged another kill some time last week - which wasn't convenient at all, since it meant he'd drugged Will with something that had given him a wicked migraine for two days and he'd had to cancel his plans with Del. That was probably a bonus, in Hannibal's opinion. *Asshole.*

Still, though he had over a decade shaved off of him, Will was good with faces, and he knew the man currently slouching in his doorway frowning at him.

*Well, fuck. Why does this have to happen now when I speak subpar Italian at best?* It wasn't ideal, Inspector Pazzi (Was he an inspector? Will wasn't sure about the details of this point in Hannibal's life. Perhaps this was even earlier than it should have been for Pazzi to show up? Had something in their timeline changed?) linking Hannibal to the murders when everything was so... *unstable*. But since when had life ever been even a tiny bit accommodating to one Will Graham?

Awkwardly, Will shifted in place, careful to keep his eyes on the ground, naturally falling into the role of a little housebound omega. Submissive, almost fragile. *He looks like he'd eat up the Too Pure For This World bullshit. Christ, all these years later and I'm back to playing the delicate teacup.* But Pazzi seems like the kind of guy who is traditional, and getting aggressive with him is only going to raise red flags. *We don't need that.* "Uh, no, Mr. Graham. You are?"

The man frowned and Will curled in on himself, as though anxious that he'd done something wrong but all too eager to correct his mistake. "I am Inspector Pazzi, I am looking for Hannibal Lecter?" Darting an upward glance, the picture of surprised confusion, Will isn't

thrilled by what he sees. Pazzi isn't biting. Not all alphas went weak in the knees over some helpless, frail thing. *A pity, that. He'd be easier to manage. Fuck, I wish I knew if this was the right time for this. He never really said when he suspected Hannibal, just that he had.*

What Will *can* tell of this version of Pazzi is unsettling. He's clearly not found his wife yet, and he's all the more reckless for it - which is saying something, since he'd been pretty damn bold sonofabitch when Will had met him previously. He's made an effort to smarten up - slicked back hair, pressed shirt, shined shoes - but it feels contrived and not like a look that's commonplace for him. Will wonders what that has to mean. Did he dress up for this meeting, specifically? *Hannibal's known already for his appreciation of aesthetics, finicky bastard.* If Pazzi knew that, he might be seeing more than he did the last time around.

"He's just in the other room. Please, come in." Pazzi does so, keen eyes taking in the details of their rented house, politely ignoring Will's butchering of the language as he follows him to the parlor.

"You're an American?" Will tensed. He couldn't help it. He'd lived for long enough in France that most people couldn't pick him out as somebody who wasn't local, but he stumbled over Italian, the tones and inflections. *That's not good.*

"Uh, yeah. Born, but not raised." Though he's outwardly portraying himself as someone who is nervous and shy, perhaps a little anxious about having the police at his doorstep, inside Will's mind is chaos, burning up like a thousand stars, trying to sort out all the possible ways this could go and planning for them accordingly. It's impossible to not be cataloguing everything, even the smallest of details.

Pazzi has softened towards him somewhat, but that isn't necessarily a good thing because now he's very close to becoming concerned about Will. *The last thing I need is for him to think I'm a hostage or a victim in this. And there's no way he won't, once he meets Hannibal, because I already know that idiot going to put on a show for his first collision with the cops.* He wouldn't be Hannibal if he wasn't smug.

*Ugh. Why do I love him again?*

Sure enough, Hannibal's head lifts up from the book he's been reading, and it's clear that he already knows who Pazzi is. (Will's seen him devouring the newspaper coverage, and Pazzi is pictured there several times, fuming in grainy black and white.)

"Hannibal, this is Inspector Pazzi." Will pretends to fumble, fiddling with his hands. It's almost an afterthought, pretending he's uncertain, and he notices that Pazzi steps both closer to Hannibal... but also *slightly* in front of Will. Defensive. *Fucking alphas.* "He asked to speak with you. I'm sorry, I didn't ask why."

"It's quite alright Will, you were correct to show him in." Gracefully Hannibal stands, holding out his hand. "Inspector Pazzi? I recognize you from the papers. Please, sit. Is there something I can do for you?"

---

"I'm worried, Hannibal." Pazzi has left them, more suspicious than before. Hannibal is thrilled, naturally.

"Why? Small men mean nothing, in the grand scheme of things. And don't be mistaken, Pazzi numbers among them." Hannibal casually ran his fingers through Will's hair, just once, before turning and heading back to his book, completely unconcerned and confident in his ability to play the game.

*Maybe he's right... but Pazzi is also obsessed, like Jack was. Obsession doesn't bode well for any of of us.*

---

Strangely, the moment comes with little fanfare. Preparing his first real meal. It feels like his entire life was culminating up to this moment, to lovingly plating his kill and serving it to the strange, thoughtful omega seated at his table, watching him from under the fringe of his curls.

It had started small, this idea. Almost by chance really. When he came to live in Florence Will had taken over a lot of the more domestic chores when he wasn't studying or being given lessons by his private instructor, but the main thing he'd started to do was prepare meals. When asked about it he'd gone suspiciously still, and answered vaguely about being taught by a close friend. *It reminds me of him, that's all, and I like it.*

Whether the impulse had been born then, out of jealousy, Hannibal can't be certain. But it had taken root and grown there, in the darkness of his mind, interest transferring over to his kills as he began to appraise them as food. He already had a very extensive knowledge of anatomy, which only grew with each day he worked towards becoming a doctor, was it any wonder that he wasn't curious as to what it might be like? And it was so fitting, to consume them, these lesser men. They were beasts, unfit for company. But they were worse than the rest of the mundane people filling the whole of the Earth. *No, they're not even people at all. They're more like... swine.*

After he quickly and cleanly kills a mugger in an alleyway, he recalls with startling clarity the odd way Will had looked at the fallen bodies of Grutas and his men. Like he'd been considering something, only he'd shook his head instead and helped drag them outside, allowing the snow to bury them. Hannibal decides to remove a portion of the mugger's thigh, a clean cut that will be noticed but probably not seen for what it is.

At home, he lays it on a plate and considers his options carefully. There is a small selection of cookbooks on a shelf near the fridge and he flips through them now, consulting, wanting to choose the perfect recipe. *Something grand, but nothing outside of my capabilities. I am not the chef Will is. It's unfortunate that he can't help me, I'm sure he'd have some opinions on the matter.*

That delightful image in his head, Hannibal proceeds to prepare the evening's meal, telling Will when he stops in the doorway only that he should dress formally for the occasion.

For a moment, Will pauses, taking in everything, and the look on his face... it's *exquisite*, even if Hannibal can't parse it all out. He'd call it fearful longing, if one insisted on labels. But it seemed to be more than that and it only enhanced the experience. Elevated it to something more, almost ritualesque.

With everything in the oven Hannibal takes his time dressing, applying care and precision to everything because he wants so badly for it to be *right* for reasons he can't fathom.

Seated at the table, which is modestly decorated with feathers, orange blossoms, and pomegranates, he watches Will take his first bite, something dark and primal in him satisfied by the lack of hesitation. *I have provided for him, with food and comfort and shelter. Basic instincts that I am naturally compelled to fulfill. Yet this is something more, dining on the corpse of a rival. Proving myself as the better predator.*

Pink lips close around the tines of his fork, and Hannibal... he doesn't know *what* he feels. Only that it is overwhelming in it's intensity to watch as the clever boy turns to him, eyes dilated and swallowing heavily. *It's almost as though he knows what I have served him, this devil's dish.* Hannibal has to wonder if, knowing, Will would bring himself to continue.

He does.

---

It's a cold day in November - overcast and cloudy. Back home there'd be ice crusted around the edges of the river beds, maybe snow, but Will likes the brittleness of the air here. The sting of it. Last week he'd reached a bit of a milestone: sixteen. They'd celebrated with a quiet dinner at an exclusive restaurant, and had come home to a surprise visit from Mischa, Chiyoh, and Murasaki.

They'd only stayed for two days, but it had been good. Great even, though he still didn't know how Hannibal had uncovered that detail. Before he'd just always given Will gifts on the anniversary of the day he'd appeared in their lives, and honestly? Will felt like that day was a better marker in terms of birth, but he didn't say as much.

Today was another sort of celebration of the same event. Del and Louis had flown in early this morning and they were all currently settled in the park. Hannibal and Del had gone for a walk - Will had declined, he'd had enough of their passive-aggressive bitchiness on the drive over - and Louis was sitting with Will on the blanket they'd brought for their rather odd winter picnic. It's the first time he's seen them since they'd left Italy and returned to Paris, but Del had insisted on being there. *Don't be silly, Will, I can't leave you alone to celebrate with that hulking idiot now can I?*

Since their initial meeting, Will's struck up a sort of friendship with Louis, who really isn't so bad when he's away from Del. He's smarter than he plays at being, and sharp, with a strange sense of humor that Will can appreciate. It's only his absolute conviction in thinking that Del wants him soft, wants him meek and delicate, that's changed him. Even now he's watching her, almost mournful, hand held gently against his abdomen. **"She's always praising the submissive ones, then looking at me. Like I've disappointed her."** Even his sighs are soft,

muted. Like he's fading away. **"Meeting you, I'm started to think she doesn't know what she wants."**

*You're more right about that than you think.* Though it's early, Will knows Louis is expecting because he'd called to tell him the good news, and Will... so help him, he's *thought* about it. About letting it happen. Because if she's Bedelia, not Del, then he's allowed to hurt her. To make her pay in *full*.

But there's Louis. And that hangdog expression on his face. And the baby. And... Del herself.

She isn't terrible when she's not caught up in the lie of herself that she's building, and it would be a shame to let her become the woman he knew without at least trying to stop her. So when Hannibal and Del return Will asks if she doesn't mind walking with him too, so he can stretch his legs. **"Come on Del, you can't be tired, and we never get to talk."**

They're halfway across the park - far enough that Hannibal and Louis can't make out their expressions - when Will threatens Del as neatly and simply as he possibly can.

"Let him have this one, Del."

"Excuse me?" Will ignores her indignant tone.

"Nothing says you have to live with them if it's that bad, but it's not like anybody expects an alpha to be all that involved in the first place. One baby, and I'll tell you how to drug him so that he doesn't have more. How to even suppress his heats completely, if you're really so unmoved by him." Perhaps it isn't good or right, what he's just offered. It sure as hell isn't fair. But it's a compromise he can live with. "Let him keep it."

"That doesn't sound like a request, Will Graham." To her credit, Del isn't asking him stupid questions and isn't playing dumb.

"It isn't." Because really, it's not. He might have thought about it, but in the end... Will can't let it happen. And if Del won't stop he'll stop her, and that's that. "For the sake of our friendship, I'm asking you not to." Beside him she's stiff as a board, shifting rapidly through emotions, everything from fear to sorrow to joy, but Will isn't letting himself fall into her head. He doesn't want to know what boxes he's just checked for her, or what this conversation might mean for Louis going forward. He just wants it clear, the stance he's taken. "If you do, you're going to regret it."

They're staring at each other now, and Del licks her lips uncomfortably. She hadn't thought that Will would go this far, hadn't even considered that being Will’s friend didn’t mean she was immune to his more darker impulses. *I'll give it to Bedelia, she wasn't this naive. But this just makes it easier.* "You're threatening me?"

"You know exactly what I'm capable of, Del. And I'll tell you right now, who you're becoming, this.. *Bedelia* persona?" He pauses, allowing everything he feels for Bedelia du Maurier to show on his face. "I'm not a big fan."

Del pauses, stumbling a bit at the raw *dislike* evident in Will's expression. The absolute hostility of it. But she wouldn't be Del if she wasn't brave, and stubborn, and a bit foolish to boot. Will likes that about her. "I'm not afraid of you."

"Nobody is. Doesn't stop me." He shrugs, dropping the conversation and returning to their companions without another word, appreciating the whole time how Hannibal must have felt dancing so carefully around those he liked and admired who also could very easily turn on him had they discovered his proclivities. Miriam, Beverly, Alana, even Jack. *And me.*

*Please don't make me kill you, Del.*

---

The Painter of Paris leaves a gift in Florence, confident that Hannibal will find it first, and he does.

He's enraptured by it, by the idea that it was made for him. A gift. An offering.

But he's cautious, wary of what it might mean. Of the Painter's intentions.

Serial killers aren't known for their good behavior, after all, and this one has followed him home.

---

He's been pushing Hannibal, hard. Helping to mold him. Manipulating him. *Is this how you felt, trying to coax me out of the light?*

---

They meet with Del and Louis two more times before they depart for Paris once more, and on both occasions Del continues to prod Hannibal and to suggestion, rather heavily, that she finds him lacking. Unworthy of *her* Will. It's infuriating to be polite when she's suggesting, rather strongly, that he give him up. *You don't even know what you have in him, don't even see how much he obviously loves you. You're a damn fool.* Hannibal would like to think he'd responded curtly, with dignity. But all he could think in the moment is that he hadn't actually considered that Will Graham loved him.

---

It's been six months, long enough for Will to have had a heat by now. Except he has *not*. It a curious thing, one that often steals more of his attention than Hannibal wants to give... yet he refuses to ask, not only on principle. He likes the game between them, the one that Will is actively playing. No one else ever has. They find it so often to be manipulative or insincere, but *Will*, he simply offers that odd half-moon smile of his and ups the stakes. Sidesteps and continues on as though nothing is amiss.

And so Hannibal does not ask.

Instead, he does something that he thought was beneath him: he begins to follow Will. He cannot do it often, or even daily - he has classes to attend, professors and doctors to impress - but he does so enough that he's able to reliably guess Will's whereabouts when he cannot be there to track his movements in person, which brings about a strange sort of comfort. No doubt his own instincts to protect trying to lull him in to feeling secure with his place in Will's life - and that is foolishness. Nothing about Will is stable or secure, but Hannibal rather likes that about him, his sheer unpredictability. The way he ghosts in and out of their home without fear. Bold and uncompromising.

On this particular day, Will has deviated from his usual schedule and has headed towards a market nearly an hour's walk from their home. He doesn't go often, only once every couple of months, and Hannibal hasn't yet been able to discern what it is that draws him to the modest offerings available in the small, out-of-the-way square. There's lots of vegetables, fresher than typically seen in the stores, but Hannibal doesn't think Will would trouble himself to travel so far for a high quality produce.

*And if he would, there's no reason it couldn't be delivered to our home.*

*Then again, I've seen the way he can get about food.*

It's almost as though it isn't him in the kitchen at all when he cooks, preparing and plating everything with the care only a true perfectionist possesses, and Hannibal knows Will is not among their numbers. (The state of their room is evidence enough of that, Will now comfortable enough to blatantly leave his things strewn upon every possible surface with no regard towards organization whatsoever.)

Whatever the reason for Will's obsession with their meals, that isn't what brings him here now, with Hannibal carefully trailing behind, noting where Will stops and trying to reason out why - though the trip ends the same way others before it have. Will finds a lovely pink scarf embroidered with sunflowers, which is no doubt a gift for Mischa, before purchasing a selection of herbs that are unfamiliar to Hannibal.

The woman wrapping them up for him raises an eyebrow, a shared look of quiet conspiracy, before offering the package to Will, and it's that that has Hannibal... *curious*. Impossibly so. Just what is it that he's acquired? A lesser man might suspect Will of poisoning him, combining such a purchase with his culinary efforts and coming out with a grim answer, but Hannibal has never believed that poisoning is only the work of omegas in the first place, let alone that Will would go to such lengths. *If he ever decided to harm me, it would be with his bare hands.*

Rather than following Will home once he concludes his business and heads out, Hannibal spends more time in the market, browsing the stalls - including the one where Will made his purchase. Though he can identify the many individual scents to each of the dried herbs, he cannot possibly say which is which, and the seller (who is an omega, he can tell that much) seems very nervous about his presence, so he politely retreats, spending the rest of his time mulling over just how he might convince Will to reveal the truth of today's adventure. Unfortunately, pushing Will to giving up information is no easy task. Or is it fortunate?

Everyone else can be so mundane in comparison, so very easy to lead along the garden path. If Will chooses to follow, he does so willingly, fully aware of Hannibal's... suggestions.

When he returns home later Will is once again absent - no doubt at the dog park, as he's prone to visit there at least a few times a week - and it provides a chance for Hannibal to inspect Will's purchase. (He does not consider it snooping, even if the herbs have been hidden on the top cabinet above the fridge.)

He's taken the time to crush them and sort them out in to individual sachets, clearly to be used as a tea of some kind, and Hannibal connects the dots very neatly. *An effective herbal remedy. I wonder how he came across such a thing?*

Caught up in his musing, wondering how it is that Will possesses such knowledge when even greatly respected figures in the medical field do not, he's unaware of the presence behind him until a calm voice speaks up. "You could have asked me about it." Turning smoothly, without even the smallest hint of unease, Hannibal merely arches a brow. He doesn't know why, but in private they often speak English with one another. There's a comfort to it that he cannot define.

"I haven't heard of any natural means to suppress heats that worked so effectively before." If he is surprised or dismayed by Hannibal's conclusions Will reveals nothing on his face, though his head tilts to the left slightly, as though thoughtful, and Hannibal can't help needling him. Wanting to garner some sort of reaction. "I do wonder how healthy it is for you to do so."

Will doesn't give him the satisfaction, shrugging instead before crossing his arms and leaning against the doorway. His eyes never stray from Hannibal's, nearly piercing in their intensity. It's a look Hannibal knows well - and it means he's stumbled upon another layer of their game, one Will has been patiently waiting for him to find. It also means the rules have changed. "You could tell me not to."

"Would you listen?" Hannibal knows he's stalling, hoping to gain the upper hand but unsure as to how he may achieve that. To tell Will not to do something seems like the best way to ensure he does.

As though sensing Hannibal's internal discomfort, Will smiles, but it quickly sours. "It's better if I don't."

"Why?" Genuinely, Hannibal wants an answer to that question, to know why it is that Will insists on hiding in such a way. He's such a frustrating creature, all brambles and thorns and haunting mystery. But Will is rarely openly angry... which makes this moment rather surprising. Without realizing it, Hannibal has struck a nerve, somewhere, only he doesn't even know what he's said that has set Will off. And isn't the more aggravating than anything?

Thankfully, Will chooses to enlighten him. "You don't want me." A heavy pause, blue eyes finally cast to the ground, as though a more palatable answer might be found on the smooth tiles. "You want her."

"You seem so certain of that." At that Will's head jerks back up, for once losing the upper hand - and doing so beautifully. Hannibal likes seeing him this way, shocked and vulnerable and so very open. He doesn't think Will could hide a thing from him in this moment, and the heady power of that thought is delightful.

"Don't you?"

"She came here, while I was away." *Always softly cajoling, trying to win back my favor. Knowing she had betrayed me so completely but unable to help it. She was drawn here, just as a shaped her to be.* "Often."

"I'm aware." Will's tone is sullen, bitter. And so divine to hear, because it only confirms that this *matters* to him, when little else seems to.

"The last time she asked if I would claim her." And how sweetly she'd asked, after they'd finished discussing Will's place in their life, she'd knelt on the floor, rested her glossy head on his knee, and begged. "I did not."

Hannibal can safely say he's never seen Will Graham well and truly stunned into silence, not before now. His mouth has parted slightly, his breathing has increased, and his luminous eyes look so wide on his young face. He looks like he's in ecstasy, or great pain. He looks like art. *He looks like he's mine.* The seconds pile in to minutes, with no sound between them. For his part Hannibal is afraid that any small movement, even the slightest breath, will send Will bolting from the room. But finally Will speaks, the words soft and uncertain. Hannibal wishes he could bite in to them. *They'd be so succulent, like biting in to a peach.*

"If I stop, it'll be a week. Maybe sooner." He looks terrified, and so, so exquisite.

Drifting closer, telegraphing his movements, Hannibal gently takes Will's chin in his hand and kisses him on the forehead, but makes no request one way or another. He'd never make such an obvious blunder.

When he steps back, intending on leaving Will to his thoughts, he's stopped by an uncertain whisper, the word hardly audible. "Why?"

(Will cringes to hear himself, how meek and despairing, he sounds. He knew why *his* Hannibal loved him, but this one? This young half-stranger wearing such a beloved face? What is his motivation? But then, he's known for a while know that Hannibal has begun to consider him as more than a sexless possession.)

---

Will stops.

Within three days he's in pre-heat, hot and uncomfortable in his own skin.

And Pazzi is becoming a problem.

---

After that first, tense meeting, Pazzi had begun to shadow Hannibal more closely. Nothing overt or obvious, but Will had taken notice of him lurking outside of restaurants, lingering outside of classrooms. He wanted his presence to be felt and known, as though it would pressure Hannibal enough to make a mistake. *Which is fucking stupid of him, if he really understands Hannibal at all. Following him around just makes it more challenging. More fun.*

Will knows in his own, original timeline that he wasn't a problem for many years, but so much has changed. What if his obsession has driven him to push harder? It's clear he thinks Will is a helpless captive and probably has from the first moment he saw him. Two weeks ago he'd actually come to the house while Hannibal was out and tried to convince Will to escape, saying that if he testified against Hannibal that he would be free to go back home to his family. *I probably should have kept up the doe-eyed, dipshit routine... but he was being such a dick about it.* Will had finally thrown him out and not-so-subtly threatened the man to watch himself.

Not his best moment, truth be told, but something about Pazzi irritated Will to his very core. *He's like a combination of the worst parts of Jack and Freddie fucking Lounds.*

Which unfortunately meant that Pazzi was smart. And that made him dangerous.

*It has to be now, before I lose my nerve. And myself.*

---

Wiping at his brow, hating that he was timing this so closely (but knowing that being heatsick made for one hell of an alibi), Will crept through the quiet house and let himself out the library window. He knew Pazzi would be nearby, keeping his self-decided vigil, and that he'd be very likely to follow if he saw a chance to try and pressure Will again outside of the comfort of his own home. After all, omegas in pre-heat were thought to be oh so susceptible to the influence of an alpha.

*Come on, you cocky bastard, follow me.*

Pazzi follows.

Will leads him on a merry chance through the darkened streets of Florence, being sure to portray himself as terrified and uncertain. *Like I'm fleeing for my life.* It was sure to throw Pazzi off his game, to make him more confident that he was about to collar Hannibal. *And the chase is only going to enhance that.*

Eventually they come to an old cemetery, and Will does what he came there to do: he kills Pazzi.

It doesn't go smoothly. He's older than he was when he took on Grutas and his men, and he's stronger, but Pazzi is clever and quick. And fucking *armed*. He manages to shoot Will, the

first bullet glancing off his ribs while the other punches a hole through his thigh, and when the fight gets physical, the two of them up close and personal, scrambling for victory, Pazzi also manages to break Will's hand and two of his fingers. But in the end, Pazzi goes down. Hard.

Disposing of the body in an old grave he'd opened days before, Will knows he won't be found quickly. Or at all.

By the time he gets home, dizzy with pre-heat and bloodloss, he doesn't have the energy to try and mask his re-entrance in to the house. He simply levers open the window and climbs through, only to be confronted by a very awake Hannibal. *Dammit, he must have known about the crushed up sleeping pills.*

Whatever the other man is thinking, it's made him incredibly angry, furious even, and Hannibal has seized him by the throat, clenching down tightly. "Will."

Will fights to speak through the constriction. "Hannibal."

With his bloody, broken hand Will traces Hannibal's jaw - an appeasement gesture that also rather neatly apprises Hannibal of Will's various injuries. But Hannibal is in no mood for such placating gestures, it seems, because he practically drags Will to the bathroom - still holding him tightly by the neck before shoving him away. "Strip."

Though Hannibal is clearly not happy with him, Will has seen Hannibal enraged before, and this is different enough that he isn't afraid for his life. No, this is something else: fear. So instead of arguing Will does as he's told, obediently following Hannibal's terse, bitten-off instructions until he climbs in the shower. There he can't help but whimper while trying to wash his hair, his mangled hand too damaged to be of much use, though he tries before a hand reaches out to stop him.

Hannibal has disrobed and climbed into the shower with him, but Will's in too much pain to really appreciate that fact. Not to mention, Hannibal looks like he's swallowed a gallon of nails and is very keen to take out all of his frustration on one Will Graham if he's given even the slightest reason to. *Yeah, this whole situation is not exactly ideal.*

Almost as if on cue, from the other side of the shower Will can see the shadow of what he knows to be *his* Hannibal, the one who has helpfully guided him throughout this long, unconventional courtship. "He was afraid something had happened to you again." *I know.* "Anger is a much safer, more allowable emotion for him." *I know that too, Hannibal.* "You must be very careful how you proceed from here, Will." Given that he's not bound by any real rules or laws, it's easy for the hallucination of Hannibal to appear behind him while the real, living version scrubs him down - paying careful attention to his wounds. "He's going to be very angry with you, about Pazzi."

Will nods slightly and the moment ends, with him once more alone with the monster he's been craving for years now.

When they finish in the shower Hannibal dries him off, impossibly tender - a stark contrast to

the grim displeasure written all over him. Will wants to comfort him, but he's paralyzed by the sense that he might have miscalculated badly, and the feeling only grows when he sees how white-hot with rage Hannibal becomes when he realizes that those are bullet wounds. *Plural*.

He doesn't speak, but he's thinking so loudly that Will can practically hear him regardless: *a few inches to the left, and you'd be gravely injured. Possibly dead.*

Neither of them has spoken out loud yet.

Will is trembling, on the cusp of full-blown heat after the adrenaline high, and he doesn't know what to say, only that he has to say something to diffuse this. To make it better. *But I have no fucking idea what that is. I'm not good with words. That's Hannibal's shtick.* But Hannibal isn't speaking, and it's painfully clear he's waiting for some sort of explanation, so Will... he tries to give him one. One that he'll understand. "He was dangerous, Hannibal."

Again, there's a hand at his throat, squeezing, though he can see how conflicted Hannibal is in this moment. Angry that his game has been interrupted, afraid because Will was nearly lost to him - *again!* - confused as to Will's motivations, but angry again because he'd planned on enjoying Pazzi's struggling for so much longer.

"I'm sorry I brought nothing back." Hannibal looks at him, startled, but Will plunges ahead. "I asked why me, before." *Why is this so hard?* "I think I know why." His voice is soft, a broken whisper struggling to escape his airway. "Because I eat at your table. I will always eat at your table." The confirmation has Hannibal seriously choking him now, but Will doesn't struggle against his hold. "Ask-" He coughs and tries again. Determined to speak. "Ask me."

"No."

The world goes dark.

# Reverence

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will wakes in the dark, safely tucked away in his nest. Hannibal isn't there and the door is locked. Clearly, he's being punished in some way, but Will can't help the flair of panic. What if Hannibal has left him behind? He takes a few steps back before taking a running leap at the door. His shoulders aren't very broad, and he remains a slender, scrawny sort of omega despite his efforts... but the door rattles on its hinges. Will tries again, wincing at the pain in his side, in his leg, at the way each collision with the door jars his broken hand. *Again*. The third time something splinters, but the door holds.

Will keeps going.

The next time, the door finally gives and Will shoves it away impatiently. Half-way delirious in his need to find Hannibal. To find his alpha. He doesn't realize that he's speaking out loud. "I have to find him. I know he's not you, he might never become that man, but it's enough. I want him on his own. I'll take him and I'll kill anyone who tries to stop me." He finds him in the library, standing by the window in the dark, staring out at the city. Will is still babbling to himself, even as the other man turns and frowns at him. Vaguely, he can feel blood running down his side and leg, the stitches broken after his mistreatment of them.

"Will." The word is an admonishment, but he doesn't care. *He doesn't fucking care.*

"I found you." He crosses the room and holds Hannibal firmly by the waist. "I'll always find you. In every single life I'll find you."

"You've hurt yourself." Hannibal's hands against his back and head are gentle again, worried, brushing along his sides, frown deepening at the sight of blood.

"I don't care." He can feel himself getting hysterical.

Hannibal tries to pull away, delicately, but that only makes Will cling harder to him, his heat-addled brain thinking that he's going to be abandoned if he dares let go. *I'll lose him again if I do. Just like before. He'll be gone and I'll be alone and I might never find him again. I worked so damn hard to have this life. It's mine. I won't let it go without a fight. I won't.* "Will please, let go, I need to look at-"

"No."

"Will-"

"Please keep me." The words are a hushed whisper, so soft they might as well not have been said.

Hannibal hears them anyway, tightens his hold and kisses the top of his head. "You impossible creature. Of course I will keep you."

---

The heat that follows is brutal and intense, in the way it can often be after ceasing suppressants cold turkey. Will doesn't remember much. He knows that he'd begged, with his body and his mind and his mouth, for this to be it. To be *enough*. Hannibal must have taken him at least a dozen times, each a little bit more savage than the last, his person suit unable to withstand the torment of having Will *exactly* as he wanted him, pinned and pliant and screaming.

But still, Hannibal doesn't allow Will to bite him.

---

After that... they settle into a sort of domesticity that's more fraught with tension than before. Will has moved back to his old room. At first it was because he was enraged that Hannibal would deny him - once more - when Will would do anything for him. He was so angry at the rejection, so hurt and miserable. He spent a lot of time outside the house, just wandering, and isn't proud to admit that he'd killed a few times. And the men he'd killed weren't Bad Men, not really. They were more in keeping with Ripper victims than anything, though he didn't make the mistake of curating them in to art.

The thought was there though, bubbling just under the surface of his skin. He wanted to kill again. *Really* kill.

In the moments he was trapped at home there were lessons by private tutors, everything from philosophy to music, but Will couldn't really appreciate the quality of the education he was getting. Not when he was too busy chewing his nails to the quick, wondering what the future would bring him. Hannibal had begun mentioning a desire to go to American, to continue his studies there... and Will knew that meant he'd be left behind. Fucking *again*.

*I can't take it a second time. Not again. I can't, I just can't-*

"Will, I can hear your thoughts from the other room. What is troubling you?"

They've gotten distant again, Will withdrawing because it's the only way he knew how to protect himself, and until this moment Hannibal had been allowing it, mindful of the space between them and the resentment boiling over within Will after he'd denied him a chance to complete their bond. *Always so damn respectful of me while simultaneously being the worst kind of bastard.* "It's nothing." It's not nothing, obviously, but Will isn't about to admit that. Instead he puts on a brave face and tries to shoulder past Hannibal, who promptly grabs is arms and hold him in place.

"On the contrary, it most certainly is something, and you are going to tell me. Now."

For a moment, Will considers breaking Hannibal's' nose. He's not proud of the impulse, but

it's there nevertheless. He's always reacted to ultimatums with violence. "Just curious when you're shipping me back to Paris, that's all. Can I go now?"

"I have no intentions of leaving you behind, Will." *Christ, he sounds serious.*

"The laws are different there, Hannibal." Will wants to believe him so badly, feels his body sinking into Hannibal's hold on his arms, but he can't be serious. Even is he is...

"Naturally."

"I'm only sixteen."

"And?"

"We aren't bonded according to their laws. If I go there now they can legally take me away." At that Hannibal opens his mouth, and Will shoves him back roughly, so hurt and livid that he can barely think. "Don't you *dare* suggest I bite you now. Not for that."

---

Louis has his baby, a sweet little girl. An alpha. Will sends a recipe to Del, detailing what she needs to give Louis to prevent more pregnancies. There's mp written response, but the girl lives. And lives. And *lives*. Louis sends him pictures constantly, calls too. He's so happy and Will can't help but feel relieved at that, knowing that he saved this man. That he might have even saved Del from herself. It's a distraction from his own problems.

Del does respond evnetually, in her own way, sending the smallest, fluffiest dog he's ever seen in his life, a tiny, cross-eyed Pomeranian. Hannibal is visibly annoyed upon her arrival, and later that day Will finds out why: Hannibal had *also* gotten Will a dog, something Del absolutely *knew*. But the dog Hannibal got is a mixed breed little monster that Will might have been fawning over in the park - it turns out it had been a foster looking for a good home.

Will calls them Caligula (Cal for short- Hannibal was unamused, but what else do you name a tiny, screeching terror?) and Dante, respectively, and together they eat a lot of shoes.

---

It's Spring, and Murasaki and the girls have come for an impromptu, extended visit. Will has missed Mischa and Chiyoh keenly, more so while deadlocked with Hannibal over their lack of a completed bond. He didn't realize how much he needed them with him, their unwavering support and love and faith in him, until they were both wrapped in his arms.

Mischa was babbling a mile a minute, determined to tell Will every last thing that had happened since he'd left them, but he knew Chiyoh had missed him too, could feel it in just how tightly she hugged him back, and there was something about that... it's like it erased all the bitterness and dejection he'd been feeling. Wiped it out completely and replaced it with these two, precious girls and how much they meant to him.

Having them back, hell even with Murasaki present... it *should* have been a good thing. Something that couldn't be sullied or tainted in any way.

Unfortunately, it wasn't. Not fucking at all.

---

With Murasaki back, the unresolved tension between her and Hannibal had returned with a vengeance, and Will couldn't stand being in the same room as them while trying to ignore their mutual longing. He believed Hannibal when he said that he didn't want her, that he'd realized she was not suited to him... but the heart can be foolish, and he'd loved her a great deal for a long time. He wouldn't be Hannibal if he was able to let her go bloodlessly. And so instead of dealing with them, Will was sneakily day drinking and pretending not to mope.

**"Will, Murasaki made us cakes, for the tea party!"** Mischa was bouncing excitedly on the bed in her favorite dress, unable to contain herself. Recently she'd gotten very fascinated with etiquette in general and tea parties in particular, so Will had told her they could host their own and today was the day of the big event. He'd even dressed up for the occasion in his best suit while Chiyoh had chosen a more sedate but elegant black dress he'd found for her on one of his many trips to the marketplaces in Florence.

Initially, Hannibal was to attend, but he had a test coming up and slid a very formal letter under their door, politely declining the invitation, which mollified Mischa a great deal. Instead it was to be the four of them, just as it had been before Hannibal dragged him off to Florence, and frankly Will could have done without the reminder. Murasaki was already taking great pleasure in trying to remind him of his place, never missing a moment to say something cutting about his young age and unsuitability, but always in a way that was so gracious he couldn't call her out on it without looking like an asshole.

*Speak of the devil.* Murasaki was in the doorway, resplendent in a dove gray dress embroidered with foxes and ravens. **"Ladies, and gentleman, shall we?"**

Mischa practically danced out the door, trying to hard to be sedate and ladylike. Such behavior came more naturally to Chiyoh, though Will could see that she was smiling softly as he followed them to the dining room. He'd spent most of the morning helping Hannibal and Murasaki put together something lovely, and their hard work paid off - Mischa was delighted by the painted china, by the charming little cakes and dainty finger sandwiches. All of it fit into her image of an English Tea Party and for her sake Will was glad. *Sometimes I wish this was all I needed, Mischa happy, Chiyoh content. I could be happy with just this.*

*But it wouldn't be enough.*

With a sigh, Will pulls out Mischa's chair before seating himself, and together they all have a nice, proper tea.

---

It's evening when he starts to feel sick. At first he thinks he's over-indulged in the whiskey,

barely making it to the bathroom before he vomits up what feels like everything he'd eaten in his entire life. But his stomach is cramping oddly, and he feels dizzy, and shaky... and his hands are almost numb and tingling. *This isn't... this is wrong. Something is wrong.* He manages to crawl out of the bathroom and back to the room he's been sharing with Mischa, Chiyoh, and Murasaki, only two find that the latter two are absent.

*Hard to think.* His thoughts are thick and heavy, dragging across his mind. *Drugged. That's what this feels like. Like I've been... drugged. Drugged?*

He manages to pull himself up and stumble towards the living room, pace slowing as he gets closer because he can hear Murasaki speaking. At first the words don't make sense, he's having a difficult time piecing them together, but he carefully peers around the corner and is greeted with a sight that he initially can't comprehend. Hannibal is there, standing with his back against the fireplace, glass in hand. He looks untouchable, refined and devastatingly gorgeous. And Murasaki is standing towards the center of the room, wild with desperation, and she's still talking, about how she understands now, that she's willing to make a sacrifice. To give him the one thing she loves most.

Chiyoh is standing on unsteady feet in front of her, and there's a flash of something bright.

It hits him then, what he's seeing: Murasaki has a knife against Chiyoh's throat.

Will doesn't think. One minute he's frozen, listening as Hannibal begins to talk about the Aztecs, about the beauty and the horror they put their own sacrifices through to appease their gods, and the knife is biting into Chiyoh's throat, and the next he's standing there, grabbing the knife between two furious hands, tearing it away by the blade. He's shaking, so overwhelmed by everything he's feeling, and Chiyoh is falling. It's happening so quickly. Hannibal has stepped forward, neatly caught Chiyoh in his arms, but all Will can see is Murasaki. That woman.

*Finally corrupted by him, but you don't even have the decency to offer yourself in tribute.*

*I walked into his blade, you stood another in your place.*

The knife is still in his hands. He doesn't remember spinning it around, can't feel the sting of his bleeding hands, can't see the way it drips to the carpet, thick and violent red. From the corner of his eye he can see that Hannibal is holding Chiyoh still but has eyes only for Will and Murasaki, watching them both, utterly rapt, and then Will is plunging the blade in to Murasaki's stomach. *The worst sort of parody.*

But there is no comfort in this. He does not hold her. Instead he tears the blade back and shoves it back in again. And *again*. Four more times. The room is silent except for the gasps Murasaki is making, the wet sound of tearing flesh. Will is swaying, sick with what he's just seen, with how far they've all fallen, but he doesn't back down. When Murasaki steps back he follows, shoves the knife in *again*. "She trusted you. She trusted you!"

He's so angry, it's not enough to kill her body. He wants to kill her spirit too, and he is. He *sees* it. The moment of clarity in her dark eyes as she looks to Chiyoh, pliant and drugged,

sluggishly bleeding, and then back to Will. He can see her think: *what have I done? The only child I've ever had... what have I done?*

She's crumpling to the ground now, and Will turns his back on her last moments, facing Hannibal instead. Because his wrath has more than one target in this moment, both equally deserving. *How dare you risk Chiyoh. For what? For her? To see what would happen?* He hasn't seen the hallucination of Hannibal in a week or so, but he's there now... and unfortunately, the man is eerily similar to his younger counterpart on the floor. Unspeaking. Unmoving. Stunned into silence by what Will has done.

"Stop the bleeding. I'll get the med kit." He pauses in the doorway, knife still in hand. "You'd better hope she's okay."

Hannibal starts to speak, but Will is gone, running for the supplies Hannibal keeps in his room. When he returns Hannibal deftly bandages the wound after placing several stitches - the wound wasn't deep, but it doesn't matter. It's very *existence* feels like blasphemy and Will is still flooded with too many emotions to focus on anything but the way Chiyoh is whimpering, terrified and too broken in this moment to even hide it.

And then Will is holding the knife to Hannibal's throat.

"You do not play with the lives of our family." His voice is calm, frighteningly so.

"Will-"

"No. You don't get to talk. You don't deserve it." He presses the blade a little further, watches Hannibal's pupils dilate. "If you *ever* risk our family again, I'll do worse than kill you. Do you understand me? I'll tear through your spine, put out your eyes, and just when you think it can't get worse: I'll bite you and I'll *leave*." He lets his words sink in for a moment, watches Hannibal weigh them carefully. Sees that her understand the absolute truth within them. "Do you understand, Hannibal?"

"Perfectly."

"I want you to promise. Promise you will never, ever risk us again. Not for any reason."

"You have my word."

He wants to ask his hallucination if he can trust this feral man, but he already knows he can. Because that look on Hannibal's face, the one warring with his anger? That's *reverence*.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not so sure I'm happy with this chapter, but I'm satisfied for now.

Even though it's seriously all over the damn map.

Also I'm trying to catch up on comments, forgive me for being slow to respond to them :)

# The Truth of You

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal bandages Will's hands, a sweet reflection of how he'd cared for him after Tier. But it's bitter too, because that's *Chiyoh's* blood, mixed in with his own and Murasaki's. Will can't stop looking at it, thinking about what might have been. *I could have stayed sober today, fallen to a depthless sleep and when I woke up she'd have been gone and it would have been too late to save her. Hannibal still wouldn't have chosen Murasaki. I believe that.*

*But Chiyoh wouldn't be any less dead because of it.*

They'd both checked on Mischa to confirm she was well - though Will already knew she would be. Even disoriented and half-drunk, hurting her would never, ever win Hannibal's affections, and Murasaki would know that. Had she seen any other way she never would have chosen Chiyoh for such a part, but Hannibal had made it perfectly clear to her that Will was his, in whatever capacity he wished to have him. His place was beyond reach, like some sort of vestal virgin held in a vicious god's keeping.

That only left her Chiyoh to offer, meager as such an appeasement was in Hannibal's eyes. Chiyoh didn't matter to Hannibal. She was a pawn, a rook. A piece that could be spared - to *both* of them, in the end. And it was infuriating to Will because he should have seen it coming.

Murasaki was losing her mind, desperate and willing to cross all boundaries in a last ditch effort to win. *I should have known she'd try something like this. There wasn't anything else she could do that would even catch his attention. And Hannibal, as much as I hate it... he'll always be curious about how far he can push others. Fuck, why didn't I see? I could have... maybe I... fuck.*

"You're quiet, beloved." It isn't the Hannibal so gently inspecting the deep cuts in his hands who speaks. Instead it is the man he's imagined beside him for the past handful of years, the one who has guided him so carefully. His only knowledgeable ally in this whole damn mess.

Will grunts in response, causing Hannibal - the real one, standing before him, touching him like he is glass and stardust - to frown as he studies the worst of the wounds, before reaching for a sharp needle. "This is going to sting, but once the area is numb I can begin placing the stitches. You'll need many, I'm afraid."

He hasn't looked at Will since they left the scene in the parlor. Will had directed him to lay Chiyoh on the bed with Mischa, where she'd reluctantly given in to whatever Murasaki had drugged them with, before leading them both to Hannibal's room.

The false Hannibal - the one he *knows* isn't real, even if it hurts to know - places a timid hand on Will's shoulder and it's only his own ironclad sense of self-control in this moment that

keeps him from trying to shrug away from the contact. He's too raw to reveal any more - to *either* of them.

Because his gift is a burden, and it tells him that the sweet, coaxing Hannibal that has been out of reach for six long years would have behaved no differently than the one tenderly swabbing at his ruined fingers.

It's hard to acknowledge, yet it brings with it with some small measure of comfort because he can see how much his displeasure is affecting the real, solid Hannibal before him. The one who doesn't always grasp emotion and feeling, but makes more of an effort to do so. Will's gut tells him that Hannibal genuinely didn't think Will would be this upset. Angry, perhaps, but not furious enough to threaten him. And now that he does know he's made such a grave error in judgement he isn't quite sure how to make amends - partially because he's never done so before. Not once.

Well, it's time he learned how.

---

They do not dine on Murasaki. Will refuses to honor her in that way - it's a petty thing, but all he needs to do is flex his damaged hands or think of Chiyoh's empty face and he feels righteous in doing so. She doesn't deserve it, not after that. *I could forgive Hannibal for what he'd done to Abigail, and I can forgive this Hannibal for his part in the whole mess... but I can't forgive her. I can't. It's too obscene, what she did.*

Once Hannibal finished caring for him Will crawled into bed beside Chiyoh and slept, wanting her to wake in between him and Mischa, knowing it would bring her some comfort when reality came crashing down on them all tomorrow. *Not that it will mean much, once she realizes it wasn't a nightmare, but it's all I can give her.*

Hannibal had graciously brought in the dogs, and Dante clambered over and made himself comfortable tucked in against Will's side while tiny Cal plopped down at the foot of the bed, bug-eyed and wary. He never did take to Hannibal, and displayed his lack of affection now by snapping at him and growling softly.

Such displays usually amused the man, but not now. Instead he backed away from the room and shut the door behind him, knowing without being told that he'd been banished and would, in the meantime, need to clean up what remained of Murasaki's last, futile efforts in proving herself.

---

Daybreak is deceptively gentle. Will isn't sure which of them stirs first. He still feels a bit sick, and his hands protest even the smallest of movements, but when he opens his bloodshot eyes he can see that Mischa is slowly waking, stretching out before snuggling against Chiyoh's side - and poor Chiyoh is tensed up, stiff as a board.

Carefully Will scoots closer, reaching his arm out so it wraps around them both while

ignoring the twinging pain the movement causes him. **"It's okay, it's okay. We're here."**

Mischa blinks lazily, still lethargic from whatever she's been given, but he can see the moment when the smell of blood registers in her brain, the bloom of confusion there on her face. **"What... Will? Chiyoh?"** She's struggling to sit up, to ferret out whatever has harmed her beloved friends, when Hannibal enters the room.

He has a covered tray with him, presumably something that will help settle their stomachs and alleviate any lingering discomfort from whatever sedative Murasaki had given them, and his eyes remain on the ground. Almost deferential. He says nothing as he helps Dante off the bed and manages to snatch up a fussy Cal, and Will realizes that Hannibal is going to allow him to choose the course ahead.

It's a humbling moment.

He knows he can lie to Mischa, something she'll believe. Chiyoh won't contradict him. Even if she wasn't afraid she would know why he'd lied in the first place - to protect Mischa - and would agree with the feeling behind it. But he doesn't want to lie to her. Which makes the truth so much more painful, because it's going to hurt. It's going to hurt them all so badly.

**"Will?"** Her voice has gone up higher, concerned at the silence surrounding her. Mornings in their household have never been solemn affairs and it's out of place enough that Mischa's becoming distressed. *Christ, I wish this were the worst of it. I hate that you did this to us, Hannibal. I really do.*

**"It's okay, Mischa. Something happened last night, something bad."**

Will tells her the truth.

There's no other way, not without keeping secrets, and it would hurt her worse later, should she ever find out that she'd been misled. As he speaks, voice hoarse with emotion, no one moves. Hannibal has given them all beautifully put together portions of oatmeal and fruits, but it's as though Will is weaving a spell over them all, one of such beauty and horror that it cannot be interrupted by mundane needs. And when he's done, he's met with Mischa's small, stunned face.

**"She was going to hurt Chiyoh?"** She doesn't want to believe it and he can't blame her, but Will won't answer that. He refuses. Lets Hannibal face Mischa's judgment.

It takes him a moment, but finally Hannibal clears his throat and for once in his life manages to be succinct. **"Yes."**

**"Why? She loved her like her own. I don't understand."** Beside her, Chiyoh is shivering, but she's finally begun to eat her food, shooting furtive glances to Hannibal with every other bite. Will doesn't think she's ever going to trust food she doesn't prepare herself again, and he can't blame her, though he mourns the loss of her trust and wonders what it might mean for her future.

**"She felt that I was due a sacrifice, that it was the only way to win my favor."** While true, it isn't everything: Hannibal is hedging.

Will isn't about to let him, and prompts the man when he falls silent. **"And?"**

**"I allowed her to think it."**

**"But you stopped her, didn't you?"** For once in her life, Mischa looks delicate, even frail. She loves with the whole of her being, and this is a very bitter pill for her to swallow: the idea that he brother cannot be trusted.

**"Mischa... I..."** Strange to see Hannibal Lecter struggling with his words. Even in the most dire circumstances he'd never been rendered speechless, but Will has always known that the wondrous little girl sitting just on the other side of Chiyoh is unique in that sense. Even he couldn't hurt Hannibal so deeply with just a look, but Mischa? She's wounded him deeply.

**"You would have let her kill Chiyoh?"** Her voice is so small. Will reaches behind Chiyoh, pulling them both against him despite the way it pulls at the stitches in his fingers and palms. It's a paltry bit of comfort in this moment, but it is all he has.

Still standing by their bedside, Hannibal seems to shrink upon himself. *If I didn't know any better, I'd say he was ashamed.* **"I wish I could tell you that I feel shame for my actions. I know that I... the way that I think is unusual."** The words he speaks are quiet, respectful of the damage he's wrought upon them all. Will wonders if this is what he'd been like, in the aftermath of that ill-fated dinner, with Will and Abigail's blood still fresh on his hands. *Did he look this broken?* **"I regret what happened, deeply. I let the power I had over her blind me to the situation."**

**"You're supposed to protect us."** Mischa's words might as well be a sword through the heart. Hannibal actually winces upon hearing them, but he remains in place even as Cal comes bounding back in to the room and starts shaking his pant leg - something Hannibal staunchly ignores. How can he care about his tailoring when he's lost something so very precious? Without realizing it, Hannibal's actions have stained his dear Mischa's heart forever. And there can be no undoing it.

**"I have failed you, in that. I know this."** His tone takes on a more pleading edge. **"Please, Mischa... I promise, I will never do so again. And if I do, know that Will is going to hold me accountable."**

But Mischa lowers her eyes, taking up Chiyoh's cold hand. **"I don't want to see you right now, Hannibal."**

---

It has been four months since that day, and by some miracle they have made progress. By no means have they mended what Hannibal and Murasaki destroyed so thoughtlessly... but there is a steady, soft sort of peace within their household. Something Will didn't know if they'd ever find again, not after their balancing act had been so brutally upended.

That wasn't to say it had been easy. Even now, Mischa struggled with accepting what her brother had done, though they were at least back on speaking terms - a new development - and once Mischa had even managed to smile at him, before the look was tainted with the knowledge she now struggled to live with.

For her part, Chiyoh... she tried very hard to pretend she wasn't at all affected by what had happened to her. The scar on her neck was very small thanks to Hannibal's efforts, and in a cruel twist she had taken to wearing scarves to cover it. Every time she did Will was struck with a poignant reminder of another girl he had failed to save, who wore such a scar. It made him wonder if some things were fate. If the violence between them was always meant to happen, just in different ways.

If that was the case... he would still take this life, over the last, because in this life they *lived*. Hurting, damaged, but breathing.

Chiyoh had also transferred her loyalty almost wholesale to Will, which wasn't a burden he was always comfortable bearing. She went with him whenever possible, either as a companion or as a shadow lurking a block or two behind him, even to the places she wished she wouldn't follow but hadn't the heart to ban her. *I wonder what she thinks, when she watches me kill?* She'd stepped in once, when a back alley brawl with a violent, wife-beating asshole had gotten out of hand. They'd taken him down together, but it was Will who dealt the final blow, and Chiyoh faded away in the aftermath.

Strangely, the dogs had held them together, when it seemed like nothing would ever be okay. Dante was such a sweet, soulful little hound, always there to be hugged, and Cal... he was a ridiculous, puffed-up little monster, Will wasn't sure anyone could keep from laughing at the sheer absurdity of a two pound dog bullying a fully grown man who was a genuine serial killer feared by all of Florence.

And so they healed, though Will had yet to return to Hannibal's side fully, even after they'd moved just outside of Florence so that the girls could each have their own space again. He just didn't know if he could, not yet.

---

"I would know the truth of you, Will." They've tentatively started talking again, in the study after Chiyoh and Mischa are safely tucked in bed. Will doesn't know who first suggested it, or if they'd both just decided it together without speaking of it at all, but it's become a nighttime ritual of sorts to have a drink or two before bed. Another echo of the past. Usually they speak of neutral subjects - art, philosophy, or even skirt around their own thoughts on darkness and morality. Tonight is apparently different.

Hannibal's words left him before Will was even seated, which spoke of his impatience on the subject. *Not that I can blame him.* "The truth has many sides."

That kind of sidestep ordinarily pleased Hannibal, but tonight he didn't even smile. Instead he leaned forward, earnest and painfully serious. "Then I would know yours."

"I don't know how to tell you." It's true, and Will finds himself shrugging, helpless to explain himself and still afraid that he could lose this life at any moment. "I don't know if you'll even believe me. I don't even believe me. But every now and again something happens and I know it's real." Hannibal offers him silence, and finally Will swallows a mouthful of whiskey, trying to find the courage in himself to speak. "What if I told you that I'd known you before. In another life, a mirror of this one?"

"Reincarnation isn't an unheard of concept." To be honest, Will had almost expected disbelief, maybe even laughter. But of course Hannibal is taking him perfectly seriously. *He always has.*

"Yes, but it wasn't like that. Isn't like that." It's so frustrating that he doesn't have the words, they keep gumming up in his throat, lodging there. "In that life... we were different. And closer than two people could be." He allows himself to pause, to look at Hannibal so he can better gauge his response to his next words. "We died with blood in our teeth."

"Perhaps you should start at the beginning then, dear Will."

"It's complicated." Will sighed, heavily. "I was alone for a long, long time. It was like... like playing chess in the park by myself. Over and over again. I was bored and lonely and everything hurt. And then one day you strode over and took your place opposite me."

Hannibal snorts, partially amused. "You were hardly ten when we met, Will."

"Not then. I was in my 30's. I lived by myself in the woods, with seven dogs, and worked as a professor as well as a profiler for the FBI." Now that he's started, Will can feel himself falling into the story, realizing just how much he's wanted to tell Hannibal the whole of their story, the beginnings of it. "You were a psychiatrist. Mine, actually." That earns a brief, pleased laugh from Hannibal. "You were also known as the Chesapeake Ripper, one of the most notorious serial killers in the Baltimore area. What followed was... it was... I don't think there are words, for the trials we put eachother through. For the things we endured. So much betrayal and hurt. And death. But I always found you, because you *wanted* to be found. You wanted me to be more than I was, to see me take my place at your side. Or, he did, at least. Sometimes it's hard to remember you aren't him." He can't help the brief pause, eyes falling to his lap. "Other times it's so painful to think about I can't breathe."

It's quiet for a long time as Hannibal carefully considers what he's been told. The impossible truth of it. "So that is who you call out for then, this other self of mine."

Naturally he focused on that. "We bonded and an hour later fell to our deaths after we destroyed a fellow hunter. A Dragon called Dolarhyde."

"You want him back."

"I do. But I want you too."

Slowly Hannibal stands and makes his way over to Will's chair, kneeling before him like a

supplicant. "Then tell me Will, please."

He does, and it's everything.

Chapter End Notes

THERE WILL BE AN EPILOGUE. Possibly a two-parter. I don't know.

Also, I just wanted to take the time to say thank you so much to everybody who has stuck with this story. It was a genuine pleasure to write, even when it was frustrating, and I'm really happy with how it turned out. I appreciate all of you so much, seriously! I wouldn't have gotten through this mess without ya'll.

I'm probably going to take a little mini-break, work on the promised drabbles and such, before I start part two of this series. I'm going to tell you right now so there isn't any disappointment that part two is Aware Hannibal/Unaware Will. Part three will be both of them aware, but that one was a more challenging story to challenge because I didn't really have any solid plot ideas for it that weren't 10000% fluff. But I thought of something and it's now a rough work in progress. Tentatively, I'm going to say that part two will start September 1st.

If you want to stay updated, I have a Hannibal-specific blog now, justfoundreligion.tumblr.com

# Like Something Holy

Chapter Notes

> I'm such a damn liar. But I spent all day working on the epilogue only to be completely unsatisfied because it didn't feel right - it wasn't finished. So THIS is actually the last chapter. You're still getting the epilogue, the story just didn't feel complete to me before. (Or maybe I just don't want to let it go. Who knows.)

By the time he finishes, his voice has gone hoarse. Hannibal hasn't moved from his position before him, utterly still, hardly breathing. He never interrupts, though Will can't help but drink in his every small reaction, watching half-smiles melt to grim hurt before drifting to something he recognizes: love, admiration, joy. He's radiating it. On any other person it would seem smug, the self-satisfaction grating and rage-inducing, but on Hannibal it's only right - Will *wants* him to be pleased, to know how hard Will has fought and struggled for them, all these years.

He wants him to *see*.

And he does. God, he *does*. He isn't even trying to hide it.

When Will is finally silently, Hannibal swallows hard. He's clearly overcome by everything he feels in this moment, struggling to keep his person suit intact, but Will doesn't want him in control. He wants to see him again, to know the monster underneath is still there, that he aches for Will. That he understands.

Timidly - *I've never seen him more uncertain, like he's come across something holy and is suddenly afraid of blasphemy* - Hannibal reaches up, cupping Will's face between his hands. "You have suffered so long in the darkness."

"Atonement isn't meant to be easy." He means for it to sound flippant, light. But his voice is rough and heavy, more of a sob. *It wasn't easy. I just never expected it to be so hard either. But nothing about you, about us, has ever come easily. I used to wonder why, but I think I know now. It's because I always fought you before, tooth and nail and screaming fury. And in this life you've taken on that role, albeit with more grace. More casual cruelty. Can we ever just exist? Accepting one another without the turmoil?*

Will's afraid to find out, but it seems he doesn't have much choice. Hannibal has begun to move, still kneeling but upright now, putting his face level with Will's own. His hands continue to hold him as if he were precious, and it's that, that kindness, that's threatening to undo him entirely. "Please don't do this Hannibal."

"Do what, Will? Touch you, with reverence? Reward your endless fidelity, your loyalty and compassion?" His voice has gone low and smoky, his accent heavier. "You have suffered for so long. And through it all you've endured so beautifully. Defiant to the very core of you." One of his hands drifts up, runs through Will's hair, while the other cups his jaw. With a gentleness that doesn't come naturally to him, Hannibal leans forward and kisses Will's forehead - a benediction. "You are more than I'll ever deserve to have, Will Graham."

"Ain't that the truth." He's crying. He doesn't want to, but he can't help it. The tears fall without his permission but he can't swipe them away angrily, not before Hannibal leans up and cleans them away with his mouth.

"I wish that I had known. Even if I wasn't ready to, I find myself wishing I had regardless. You should not have had to bear this alone."

"I didn't want to. But I had to." Will meets Hannibal's eyes, reading all of the love, the devotion, but none of the anger he'd expected. "You aren't angry?"

"You have only striven to help me become the best version of myself, a sculptor working with reluctant clay. And I find no fault in your craftsmanship."

"In your place, I hated you for that."

"You were right to. The man that I was might have been working to see you accept the whole of what you were, but everything you've done to me has come from a place of love."

"Some would call that selfishness."

"They would be wrong. There is nothing more pure on this Earth."

---

Will isn't sure what he expects following their conversation. Hannibal had led him to his room last night, tucked him in and slipped away, and he'd woken alone to find that he didn't know what would happen next. A large part of him feared that Hannibal had tricked him, and that worry drove him out of bed, determined to find Hannibal. To convince himself that he hadn't vanished like a ghost, angry at the lies and manipulation. *It's what I would have done. But no, Hannibal has not left him.*

What he's done is almost worse.

There is an entire fucking feast on the dining room table, compromised almost entirely of Will's favorite breakfast foods. It's enough food to feed a dozen people, presented with Hannibal's typical flair. *But where's Hannibal?*

On soft feet Will heads towards the kitchen to be greeted with something he never thought he'd see again: Hannibal, Mischa, and Chiyoh, cooking together. Lovingly working as one to make something special for Will. Hannibal is at the stove, finishing up the last of the boiled crawdads - which, Will's mind can't help but idly wonder where the hell he even GOT them -

while Mischa and Chiyoh are carefully cutting up a variety of fruit, giggling about something and... happy. They're happy.

Mischa is the one to spot him first, raising her eyes and smiling brightly enough to rival the sun. **"Will! We made you breakfast!"** The knife she was holding clatters to the cutting board rather loudly as she scrambles off the stool she'd been perched on and comes running towards him, sticking hands wrapping around his waist. **"Good morning!"**

**"I can see that, Mischa-girl. And good morning to you to."**

Chiyoh remains at the counter, sedately dicing up a strawberry. That's almost better, because she's *calm*. Unafraid despite Hannibal's close proximity. It's the first time he's seen her like this since that awful night and his heart aches to see it. **"Good morning Will."**

**"Chiyoh."** He nods his head, slightly, before peeling Mischa away from him and tickling her sides. **"What's the special occasion?"** He doesn't dare look at Hannibal. He *can't*.

**"Hannibal woke us up to help him. It's a special day and he said that he wanted us to be part of it, because we're a family."**

**"A special** day?"

Mischa opens her mouth to speak, but Hannibal cuts in. **"Traditionally, when one begins the courting process, they start with an offering of food. A meal, to show their willingness to provide."**

Will finds himself swallowing heavily at that. **"Chiyoh, Mischa, can we get a minute?"**

**"Okay. But only a minute! I need to put on my yellow dress anyway. It's *special*."**

**"Just make sure and wash your hands first, you're all sticky."** He manages to smile for her, waiting until the two girls have gone upstairs before turning to face Hannibal, feeling a bit like Alice must have when she'd first descended in to madness. *This isn't happening, right?* "You're going to court me."

"Yes."

"You already had your teeth in my neck, Hannibal."

"I am unworthy of you in every respect, Will. It is an unsettling feeling, to realize just how blinded I have been." The way he says it, so matter of fact. As though there can be no doubt. It stings, but it's a good hurt, somehow. "I can never take it back, the hurt I have caused you. But I can give us a true beginning, together and as a family." Cautiously Hannibal makes his way over to Will, taking both of his hands in his own, kissing the top of one and then the other. "I will be a better man. I am determined to be. And a better man would court you properly, show you your worth."

"I'm already yours. You know that."

"Then I must be deserving of you." He smiles, and it's everything. *Everything*. "Come now, go back upstairs and dress properly, or Mischa will scold us both."

---

Hannibal has never done anything by half measure. He doesn't begin to now. Yet the things he provides Will with are not the shallow, almost uninspired gifts that are customary and expected of courting couples. To outsiders, most of his offerings wouldn't be recognized for what they are at all.

He takes them all fishing, just outside of the city, and they spend the day laughing and playing and enjoying the sunshine. Cal falls in a mud puddle and ruins the backseat of Hannibal's car while Chiyoh catches the biggest fish of the day, and when it's over they drive back and cook their catch simply, before falling asleep as a group curled up in front of the fire.

Naturally, he buys Will gifts. But they are carefully chosen with him in mind. Too-soft sweaters, books of all kinds, small pieces of nature like rough crystals or brilliantly colored flowers that Will presses and preserves. He makes special treats for the dogs, begins giving cooking lessons to Chiyoh. He takes Will all over the city, to every imaginable place.

But most of all, he watches him, touches him, *loves* him, like it's as easy as breathing. Like they've always been in such harmony.

---

It's raining out, the day Hannibal figures out Will is the Painter. It isn't any one thing that gives him away, he doesn't think. One minute they're sitting together on the couch, Will's head in Hannibal's lap while the man reads aloud, and the next he's being dragged upright, until he's straddling Hannibal's thighs. "It's you, isn't it?"

"What?"

"You're the bloody little painter who left traces all over Paris."

Will laughs. He can't help it. "I was wondering if you'd figure that out."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"That part was for me, it wasn't about you, or us. I needed to figure it out."

"Liar."

"No, it's true." Will shrugs, before something mischievous sneaks in to his smile. "But after I wanted to see what would happen."

"Brat."

"Always."

---

They go to Paris, a spring trip, in order to clear out the townhouse. Hannibal has decided to lease it out for the time being, given that he fully intends to immigrate to America, which means the house needs to be emptied. Whatever they don't take with them will be put in to storage, though Hannibal has given them free reign to chose whatever they'd like to take.

While they're there, Will insists on visiting Del and Louis, and their little one, Lyla.

There's a marked change between them, and he can't help the pleasure he feels at seeing it, because they're *happy*. It's clear Del hasn't been dousing Louis, despite what Will has told her, and Louis is back to what Will imagines he was like before he came across Del. Still soft, still sweet... but not weak. There is a decided difference. Where before he'd deflected, ducked his head bashfully and accepted her praise and cruelty, now he bites back. It's evident when he first opens the door to usher them in.

**"Del! Will's here, and he brought the entire gang with him. Better hurry or I'll give the girls crayons and set them loose in your study."** Mischa and Chiyoh exchange a look, clearly believing they are too old to cause such chaos but understanding that it's also just something grownups say to joke with one another.

**"Honestly. You'd think you were raised by wolves."** Del comes down the stairs, carefully holding Lyla. There is uncertainty in her posture, but she's covering it well, and once she reaches the bottom of the landing she hands the baby over. **"Here. Take her before she ruins my blouse."** There's a sternness in her voice, but Will doesn't buy it. Del can play at indifference all she likes, but he's seen her, the whole of her. She likes being a parent. More than she expected to.

*I'm sure the army of nannies helps, but still.*

It's strange, seeing her in this role. Knowing that it was the kind of life she could only have because of him. He hadn't missed the way Louis called her Del now, or the softness evident in her. And Louis sees that Will has noticed, smiling to himself. *Good for you. I don't know what you did to break her out of her brittle shell, but I'm glad, though... does this mean I murdered Bedelia, in a way? Killed her in her infancy, before she could form?*

Selfishly, he likes the idea.

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They're supposed to move to the States sometime in August, to give them enough time to settle before Hannibal begins at John Hopkins. They still haven't discussed the issue of Will's status, though it's just about the only thing they haven't discussed. Now that Hannibal knows everything, he's very keen on not making the same mistakes. On being even more careful to hide what they are from the world.

They'd had a very long, rather heated discussion about going to America at all, about Hannibal becoming a doctor in the first place and the target it would paint on him, but in the end, Will wasn't worried. Hannibal had hidden himself beautifully before, when he was a single alpha male who fit all aspects of the profile. With a family and a mate, he won't even come under the radar, not unless he does something drastic.

Though it does bring up the whole 'mate' aspect.

Hannibal has not ceased his sometimes ridiculous courting, but there's no pressure behind it, and no judgment in him that Will has continued to suppress his heats - something he had started doing again after Murasaki had nearly undone them all with a knife. No, if anything Hannibal has displayed an inhuman amount of patience, never asking for more than Will gives, though his eyes sometimes give away his yearning.

And what's to be done about that?

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Hannibal's at school, called away from class to the administrative office and now doubt worried as to why that might be. "Will? Is everything all right?" Will keens in to the phone in response, breathing heavily. "Will?"

"Come home. I need you. Please come home."

"Will..." He can hear it in Hannibal's tone, how furiously he's thinking. That he wants to ask but is afraid it'll set Will off. He's thinking of a way to phrase it delicately. *Fuck that.*

"I will kill half the block if you don't come home and knot me right goddamn now, Hannibal." His sentence ends on a high-pitched whine, enough that it would probably be concerning if anyone else was in the house, but Will had sent Chiyoh and Mischa to Del this morning, not bothering to hide his scent from them now that his heat was almost there. Perhaps it was cruel, but he hadn't wanted Hannibal to know, not yet.

There is a long pause. "I'll be home in twenty minutes."

"Good."

This time, when Will sets his teeth to Hannibal's neck, he isn't stopped.

# NOT THE EPILOGUE BUT

Okay, so I've written a lot of what was intended to be the epilogue for this story. Trouble is it keeps getting longer, and longer, and is really disjointed and sort of shaping in to a story all on it's own. So for now, I'm going to just kind of let it sit while I think about it. I may end up cleaning up what I have and posting it as an epilogue later, or it might be a sequel. I'm just not sure. BUT, because I promised to post when the second part of the series is up, I'm happy to announce that it is! (Also the drabbles are coming, I swear. I'll post a link when they're available!)

Also I'll probably delete this chapter in like, a month or so, since it's just a note more than anything.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!